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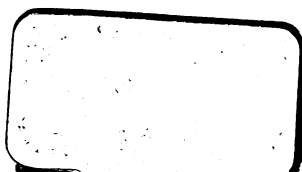
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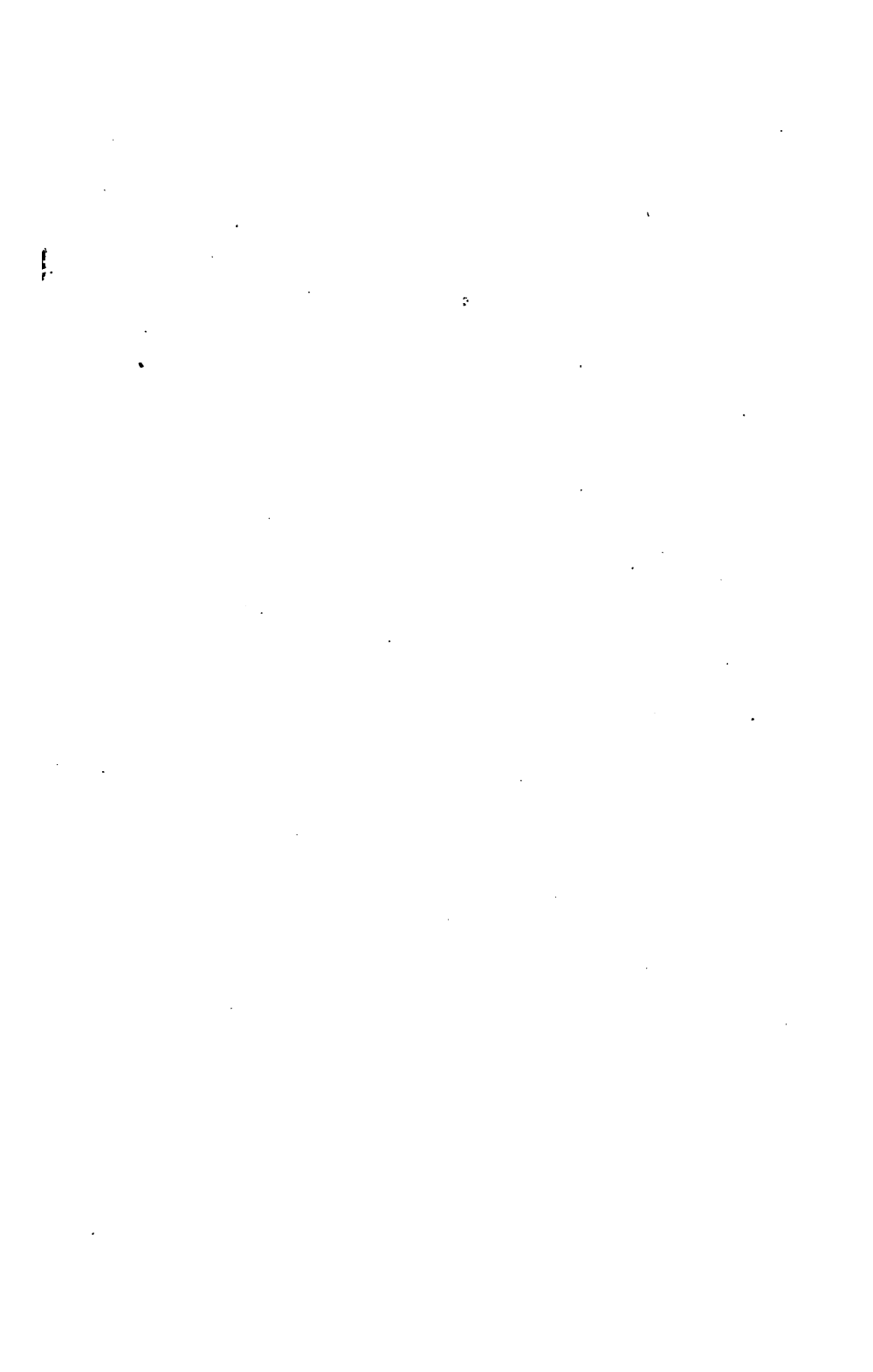
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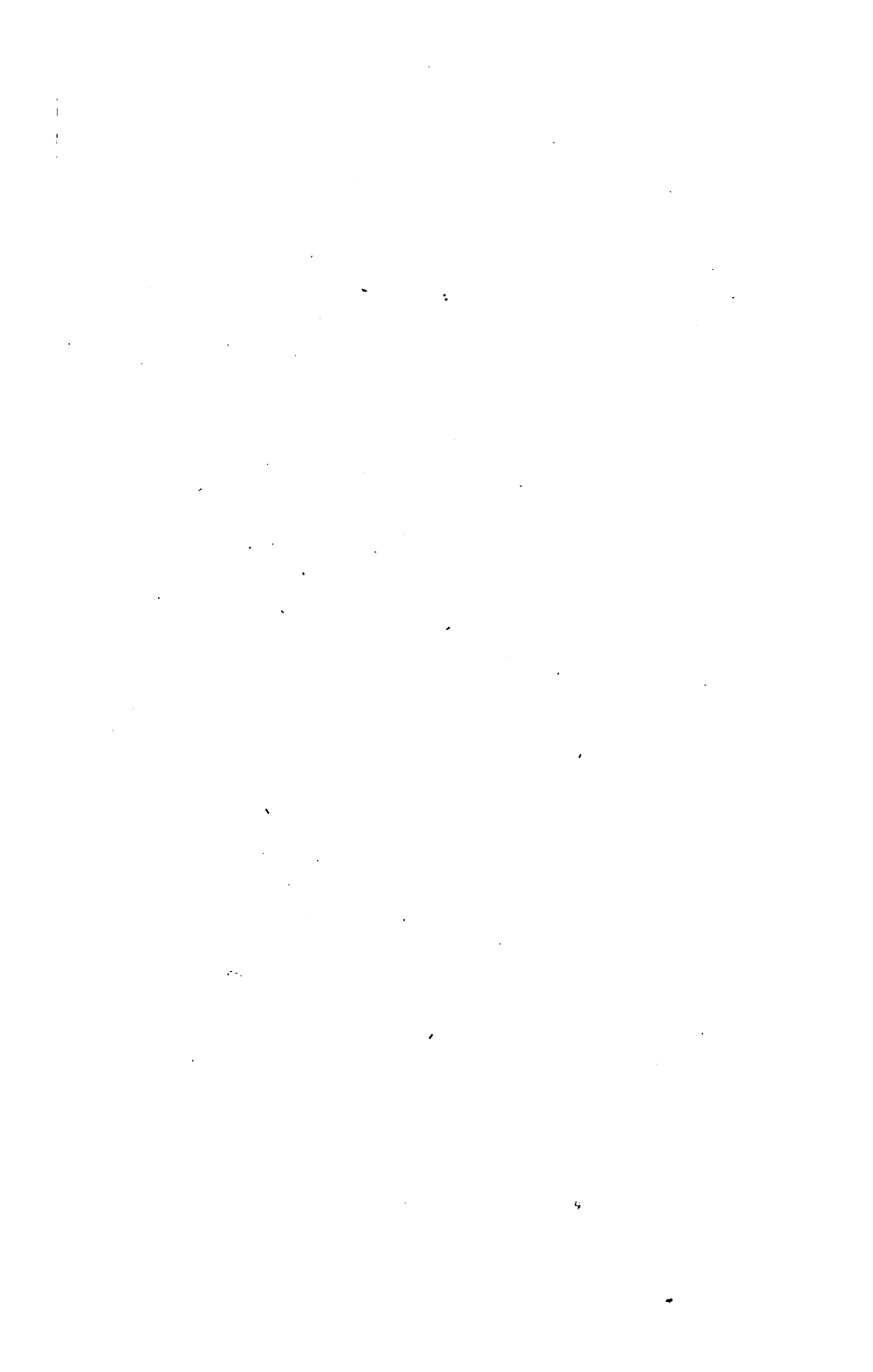
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ELINOR DRYDEN'S PROBATION.

BY

K. S. MACQUOID,

AUTHOR OF "HESTOR KERTON," "CHESTERFORD,"
"A BAD BEGINNING," &c., &c.

"There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we will."—HAMLET.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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BOOK THE FIFTH.

TARES.



ELINOR DRYDEN'S PROBATION.

CHAPTER I.

THE PODALIRIUS.

MR. BROWNLOW duly lectured his sister, received his sister's assurances of contrition and her promise to parry Cecil's curiosity, should she evince any about Maurice, and then felt himself at liberty to relapse into his abstruse studies and researches. Occasionally his mind might be said to go out of print—for there was no possible means of getting at it, so utterly had it the power of detaching itself from all physical connection. In some ways he was perhaps the

best instructor Maurice could have had ; he revered genius although without it himself, and knew how to turn to account the highest flights of the youth's imagination : but then again Maurice would have done better with a less learned, more methodical, and practical teacher, who would have had no sympathy with his dreams and extraneous pursuits. He was a very gifted youth, but considering that Mr. Brownlow had taken only one other pupil during the past two years, Maurice might have been forwarder than he was in learning. He was a passionate lover of music, and Miss Brownlow seeing this, had kindly volunteered aid in teaching him the necessary beginning, but she found that her pupil's taste far surpassed her own, and at the same time she saw that his facility in acquiring any melody that touched his fancy would render music for him a mere amusement, instead of its affording him new difficulties to master ; besides this, his eager pursuit of natural science of all kinds, happily as it chimed in with his tutor's tastes, broke in constantly on the close habits of study,

which could alone repair the loss of early education.

Maurice was never idle, but he was frittering away great mental power by using it in too many ways at once, fulfilling the old truism. Erasmus was half aware that something was wrong, and had it been set him as a problem, or in the form of an ancient inscription, or the name of some originally shaped grub, he would probably have searched on till he discovered the clue to the mischief, but unless it were placed before him as study, he never could fix his mind long enough on any living subject of interest to elucidate it.

Meanwhile, these pursuits and the reading they necessitated, helped to cultivate and enlarge the youth's mind, and to keep him content with the quiet, uneventful life at his tutor's.

"Well, now," said Erasmus after he had watched a moth through its dying agonies, and pinned it out carefully on the setting board, "it's one of the most beautiful dispensations of Providence conceivable, that those exquisite creatures can't feel, are positively created

without the suffering power inseparable from the higher orders of created beings ; they've no more sentience than a turnip — Shakespeare was wrong, I think, for once"—his sister shrugged her shoulders ; " I am inclined to think"—he put his head on one side, wagging it gently while he spoke, " that those are the three gradations : man suffers physically, mentally, and instinctively ; animals suffer in their bodies and their instincts, having both ; but these creatures and their like do not even suffer in body."

" And I believe you are mistaken," said his sister, " by your own very argument. Why, nature never jumps two stairs at once, one link always connects another ; so you must find me a class of creatures having body and instincts too, who suffer only in body, before I can admit that insects having only a body do not suffer at all."

" Well, now, Jane Ann, my dear, you're a woman, and therefore could never argue reasonably. I never argue with women, Maurice, there's no use in it ; while a man deliberates slowly on the next step to take, so as to keep

his chain of reasoning intact and clear, she—the female I mean—takes a bold leap over the marshy, unstable ground she was finding unsteady, to high and dry land quite on another side of the subject.”

“And I should like to know if it is not because a woman’s wit is so clear and sharp that she sees straight a-head of her for miles, and can leap direct to her point, while a ponderous brained man is making his way inch by inch upwards?”

“But, aunt,” said Cecil, who had grown amused by the discussion, “is there not more sureness in the course of the lumbering waggon than in that of the balloon?”

“There, now, Cecil, you’re too high-flown for me. I don’t mean Erasmus, because he’s always right, and I was only teasing; but men in general might learn a great deal more from women than they appear willing to do.”

“Are you sure they don’t?” said Maurice, —“only as we none of us like the help of anything weaker, we rarely give credit in the right quarter, although we may pocket and turn

to future use the hints that irritate us when read or spoken."

"You and Cecil are nice defenders of your respective sexes. Well, I suppose I must see to the safe keeping of this unfeeling beauty." And she walked away with the moth.

Erasmus bustled after her in a few minutes. It was a rare specimen, with an unpronounceable name, sent him as a grub from Brazil, which, after much care and anxiety, he had succeeded in developing into the full-grown insect, and he could not trust it long out of his sight.

It was not the first time that Maurice had found himself left alone with Cecil. After the first evening he had managed only to see her at meal times, but finding no reference made to Flairs, he gradually shook off his discomfort in the charm of her presence. She was so very sweet and bright, and there was such a thorough absence of frivolity or even conventionality in all she did and said, he found it impossible to resist her influence. Maurice thought, in his fanciful way, how like she was to the wild briar roses he had trained round the

gamekeeper's porch. It was a new, delicious sensation to be with a woman at all, for Miss Brownlow's ways and talk were so extremely masculine, that he spoke to her very much as he did to her brother. But to Maurice her niece was made of different clay. He felt almost timid in her presence; and now, as she turned smilingly towards him, his heart beat quickly and the colour rose in his cheeks.

"I should not have thought women's advice would irritate," she said; "men seem generally to consider our notions ridiculous."

"I don't think you would ever irritate any one." Maurice looked at her as she spoke with the sudden intense admiration that anything bright and fresh in nature is sure to kindle in a lover of the beautiful.

"I am afraid you have forgotten how I teased you about variety of occupation a few days ago."

"No, indeed." He looked very earnestly at her. "I have thought over it since, and I wanted to ask you to explain yourself."

Cecil blushed.

"I think you attach too much value to my

opinion. I never thought of offering you advice ; only for myself, I am sure I could not acquire anything unless I gave all my soul, all my energies, to its mastery."

Her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, and Maurice remembered that when he first began to study at Flairs he had been filled with the ardour that inspired Cecil now. He kept silent, hoping she would speak again. It was exquisite to watch the varying expression on her lovely face.

But Cecil fancied he was vexed, although she had spoken in ignorance that her words applied so nearly to him.

"I beg your pardon for preaching"—her clear, grey eyes looked softly up at him, and the colour deepened on her cheeks ; "but when I am alone with my father, I have a childish habit of speaking my thoughts out, giving them shape, perhaps, to hear how they will bear wording and criticism before I let them grow into opinions. I believe I was doing this just now."

She smiled up in his face with a sweet, pleading look, and Maurice thought how bright life

would be if she were always beside him ; how her simplicity and earnestness would spur him on to what he felt he might become if he had a definite purpose to strive for.

Her loveliness, the exquisite grace of her movements, and the gentleness which set him so completely at his ease, wrapped him in a witchery, like that of sudden falling off to sleep after long waking ; it is so blissful, it seems so short, we scarcely believe it has been.

The almost chivalrous devotion of his manner towards her had freed the relations between them from restraint. Cecil had become greatly interested in her uncle's pupil, he was so thoroughly unlike any one she had seen before. His changeful moods even increased this interest ; she wondered what caused the long, sudden reveries, or " mooning fits," as her aunt called them, which occasionally possessed him. It seemed to her that Maurice had mastered the pursuits which as yet her unassisted taste had led her merely to contemplate as future subjects of study or resource, and sometimes it seemed that all her favourite books and authors

were Maurice's also. No wonder she thought that with so much similarity of taste and opinion they should enjoy each other's society.

She did not understand that the strong sympathy which possessed her would have made any, the most frivolous talk, congenial ; but had she been vainer—more self-conscious—she must have become sensible of a peculiar influence exercised over her by Maurice. By degrees her arch sauciness forsook her when with him ; she became subdued and thoughtful, or if he grew animated and eloquent, she would sit drinking in his words, as if she could never tire of listening.

They were both almost silent now. Moment after moment slipped by, and still they were left together. It seemed to Maurice as if such happiness must be like Heaven.

He lingered in the drawing-room on the pretence of finding some book of reference for his evening studies. He could have found it if he had tried, but then he must have gone away from Cecil. She had offered to help in his search, and every time she asked him any ques-

tion about it, and he turned to answer, their eyes met, and her sweet glances made his heart throb so wildly, that he was fast forgetting everything but the delight of gazing at her. Perhaps it was well that before the book was found, the door opened, and Mr. Brownlow almost rolled into the room; his left hand plunged violently into his stiff, grey hair, as if he were resolved to pull it all out, and his right holding a card-board box with a glass top, on which his eyes were fixed.

"Here, Karse, my boy—Maurice, where are you? Ah, my darling! ah, my beauty! did I ever think to have you perfect? Well, to be sure, it is the greatest wonder—the most unexpected—why, Maurice, I say—well, but you don't seem moved. You don't seem to see."

He uttered the last words slowly, tapping the box gently with the forefinger of the hand he had withdrawn from his hair, which stood up wildly on end, as if alarmed at the danger it had escaped.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but what is it?" Maurice was still dreaming. Mr. Brownlow's

entrance had been so sudden, that he had not realized it.

"It! Why, you incurious youth! Cecil, have you no curiosity either? It is the desire of my eyes—the lamented of my heart—my Podalirius—my Podalirius, that I had given up for dead; and he must have emerged some hours, for see, his wings are full grown."

"He's very handsome," said Cecil, looking over her uncle's shoulder; "but I saw plenty like him last year, when papa took me to Cambridge."

"Plenty like *him*—plenty like my Podalirius! Cecil, my dear, you're a woman, or I should have called you a fool. I'd give you every tooth in my head, and both my eyes into the bargain, if you could show me an English Podalirius now-a-days. Do you think this beautiful creature"—he passed his hand caressingly over the box—"is a native? Not a bit of it—not a bit of it; he came over to me a few months ago from that frog-eating country over the water we call France, where one of the few natural productions that surpass those we possess, is this rare

papilio. The papilio you mention is another sort of creature, first cousin to this, if you please ; Homer makes their namesakes brothers you know ;—Machaon is a handsome, showy fellow enough, but remark the creamy delicacy of these wings—the soft clearness of the grey streaking. Cecil, my dear, if you ever go mistaking a Podalirius for a Machaon again, you—you don't deserve to be called my niece !”

He sat down, placed the box on the table, and wiped his forehead ; and then looked perplexedly at a note, crumpled in the palm of his right hand. He smoothed it, read the address, and held it out to Cecil.

“ I quite forget how I came by it, my dear ; but it must have arrived some time ago, for I have been holding my Podalirius in that hand ever since I went away. I hope the delay is not of consequence.” He coloured like a school-boy.

The hand-writing was large and decided, but quite unknown to Cecil ; and even when she opened the note, she had to look on to the signature, before she could discover her correspondent.

There was a troubled look in her face as she turned to her uncle.

"It is from Elinor Dryden. Aunt and I met her out this morning. She tells me she is staying at her father's house, and she wishes me to call on her."

But her uncle was blind and deaf just then to all but the increasing wings of his Podalirius.

If Cecil had looked at Maurice, she might have been struck by his changed face.

He stood still, as rapt as his tutor from all passing distraction, by the strange memories the name of Elinor Dryden had evoked.

CHAPTER II.

"HOW HAPPY COULD I BE WITH EITHER."

MR. JAMES FISHER rang the bell at Mr. Markham's, and when the maid let him in, he lounged up to the drawing-room, without waiting for announcement, as if assured of welcome.

It was cooling to this self-confidence to find that there was no one in the room to greet him ; but the check was only momentary. There was a looking-glass, and it is to some people as pleasant to contemplate themselves, as to look at others.

The glass showed him a man of more than middle height, with square shoulders, but a ra-

ther loosely built figure ; a head that promised much talent, and a face which, though supporting that promise in solidity and breadth of forehead, contradicted it by the uncertain, mean character, of the lower part of the face. The very way in which he shuffled up to the fire-place, and arranged his fair hair and whiskers, as if by stealth, gave a key to one part of Mr. Fisher's disposition ; and this moral enervation was corporally developed in excessive laziness with regard to the business of life. He professed himself a law student, waiting to be called to the Bar ; but besides living in chambers in the Temple, where he read novels, and smoked, he did not trouble himself in any way to advance his interests. He was an only child, and had just enough to live on sparely. How he managed to find money for luxuries was difficult to divine ; he certainly took as many meals at his friends' expense as possible, and this was not difficult. He was a very agreeable person, well read in light modern literature, and with a good deal of almost feminine taste in many ways ; and although men regarded him with a slight admix-

ture of contempt and distrust, he was a universal favourite with their wives and daughters—more especially the latter. He had that decided gift, or talent, which seems to ensure success among women—of rarely mentioning them in terms of praise to each other, and without in any way compromising himself, to make each think she was the only object of his admiration. He was not a special flatterer, but his usual manner was so lazy and indifferent, that it became impressed with a double charm when roused into actual homage ; and there was a tender melancholy in his handsome blue eyes, doubtless very trying to female susceptibility.

But a rustling on the staircase announced Elinor's approach, and Mr. Fisher dexterously moved himself away from the looking-glass.

She did not seem greatly pleased to see him, but his manner towards her expressed more than pleasure—there was mingled in it deep respect and hidden tenderness.

He talked on indifferent subjects, while Elinor gave languid answers, turning away as she warmed her hands over the fire ; but as the door

opened and Adelaide came in, she looked round, curious to see the greeting between the cousins ; it seemed the reverse of that between James Fisher and herself.

A bright smile lighted up the monotony of the young girl's face, and as she advanced she raised her eyes to his with a timid, loving look that made her prettier than Elinor could have thought possible ; it did not seem to move Mr. Fisher—he smiled and shook hands, but it was more the smile of welcome we give to an indifferent acquaintance, and something in it jarred Adelaide, she looked at him earnestly and enquiringly.

He did not glance round ; he knew that Elinor was watching, and he took good care not to meet her sister's eyes. For a moment Adelaide hesitated and seemed inclined to leave the room again, then she sat down beside her cousin, although a constrained look told that it was an effort to do so.

There was a slight silence, and then he asked Adelaide why she had given up her singing.

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"I don't care to sing since I have heard Elinor; sing, Nell, dear, won't you?"

Elinor hesitated; she liked to show off her splendid voice to James Fisher, but she suspected her quiet sister of an innocent little *ruse* just then.

She sang, however—better even than usual, and at first Mr. Fisher listened, but before she had finished she saw, although she affected not to look away from the piano, that he and Adelaide were in earnest talk. She saw too, that her sister was flushed and animated, and that her cousin was either deprecating or denying her assertions.

She wished her song over—what could those two be so eager about—but just as she ended, her mother came in.

"Oh, Elinor dear, have I lost your song? you must give me another then—you know I may not hear you many more times," she said reproachfully, for Elinor's discontented look was on her face; "when once you leave us, who can say if we shall meet again?"

Elinor was touched by the tremble in her

mother's voice ; she turned round and kissed her, and then sang Mrs. Markham's two favourite songs, one after another, without further asking.

Hitherto Mr. Fisher's admiration had been so evident that she had accepted it as a right without troubling herself to seek to please him, except by spending extra time and care in dressing for the evenings he was expected. It seemed natural that his manner should be more devoted and less intimate towards her than to the rest of the family—it was his homage to her superiority.

But she felt surprised, and full of an uncomfortable, new sensation when she left the piano, and saw that James Fisher went on talking to Adelaide, without even turning round to thank her for her song. As yet it had never fallen to her share to be second, and the feeling of slight was hard to bear.

She seated herself beside her mother—answering at random, though she succeeded in looking interested.

At last she asked her mother a question which

she knew could not be answered without applying to Mr. Fisher; he turned round to Mrs. Markham, and his eyes rested on Elinor: she was in her favourite position, leaning against the corner of the mantel-piece in an attitude which showed perfectly the graceful lines of her figure, and the rich masses of hair coiled round the back of her head; her face was averted, and Mr. Fisher felt something was wrong. He spoke to her—she gave a careless, almost haughty answer, without turning her head.

Mr. Fisher forgot everything else; he rose and went up to the fire-place. He understood women quite well enough to know that he must give Elinor time to recover herself, and also that he must not betray the slightest consciousness that she had taken offence. He asked her to sing again, and she said she was tired—but when a few minutes later her mother joined in the request she unbent her stateliness, and moved towards the piano, making it very plain that she was not going to sing to please him.

He followed her and hung over her, turning

the leaves and whispering rapturous words of praise, till carried away by the excitement of singing, and by the flattery which was becoming a necessary part of her life—she smiled up at him as she had not done yet. It has been said before that Elinor's smile had magic in it; it bewitched James Fisher out of all the forced devotion he had been paying, he thought her the most beautiful creature he had ever conquered, and for the rest of the evening he remained chained to her side, while Elinor, glorying in the power she saw she exercised, had never felt herself in so charming a mood; her magnificent eyes looked brighter than ever, a soft tinge of colour glowed through her clear, dark skin; she was animated with such fire and vivacity that even her mother—usually so quiet and unobserving—decided that Elinor was fit to be a queen, certainly she was the most remarkable girl she had ever seen.

She was in the midst of a racy description of a *table d'hôte* scene she had been a witness to in her summer holidays, reproducing the airs of a superbly dressed Englishwoman, whose fluent

German, and assumptive manner had impressed most of the company with the conviction of her extreme distinction, but who, when presently joined by her husband, proved to be the wife of Mr. Dryden's tailor—when her eyes rested on Adelaide. She was listening to Elinor's story, and trying to join in the laughter it excited, but effort was painfully apparent, her eyes were fixed and distended, and her face looked ghastly in its whiteness.

Elinor did not trouble herself to reflect, she stopped suddenly.

"Addy, are you ill? come nearer the fire. Whatever is the matter with you?"

Almost before the gaze of the listeners had been attracted to her, the blood rushed over the poor girl's face and temples. For an instant she seemed stunned by the shock of this public betrayal of her feelings, for like all of us when we have something to conceal, she fancied her secret written legibly on the blushes that would burn, spite of the suffocating efforts she made to repress them. She had thought herself so safe, sitting beyond the full range of lamp-light ;

Elinor's words had surprised her unarmed, as defenceless as if suddenly awakened from sleep.

But before either of them could approach her she had recovered—desperation came to help self-command.

“I'm not ill, I'm quite well; but I've something to do for Fred—I had forgotten it.”

She was gone before either of them could speak.

It all passed so quickly that Mrs. Markham's suspicions were not roused to see anything unusual. Elinor was not satisfied, but she preferred keeping the matter quiet; perhaps Mr. James Fisher's thoughts were most troubled—Elinor saw the uneasy watch he kept on the door. He lingered unusually long, although he knew the master of the house was not expected home, and although poor Mrs. Markham's eyelids drooped, and she plainly found it hard to suppress a yawn.

He lingered and lingered. Elinor wondered if he could be waiting for Adelaide to come back. At last she even grew tired of talking.

"HOW HAPPY COULD I BE WITH EITHER." 27

"Addy's gone to bed, mamma," she said ;
"we shall see no more of her to-night."

"Gone to bed ? without bidding good-night ?"
Mrs. Markham tried, spite of her drowsiness,
to rouse to the consciousness of something unusual. Elinor saw it.

"Don't you trouble about her, mamma. I saw she had a head-ache. I'll go into her room and see that she is all right, if you will promise me not to worry yourself."

Although Mrs. Markham was sleepy, the little common sense she had, had not deserted her, and Elinor had been quite long enough at home for her mother to have observed that although she was always ready and willing to employ the rest of the household in ministering to her comfort, she maintained her guestship too implicitly to inconvenience herself for others. But before she could dispute her daughter's arrangement, Mr. Fisher came up to them and said "Good-night."

He would not allow his cousin to ring the bell ; he had no idea, it had been so late, the servants no doubt were in bed ; at any rate he

would not trouble them; surely he could let himself out.

With what a strange stealthiness he closed the drawing-room door, and then crept downstairs slowly, and with almost the velvet tread of a cat. He paused on the last landing and listened; the clock on the kitchen stairs beat with the loud distinct throbs that seem to tell it is conscious of having the whole surrounding atmosphere to itself. Again he listened intently.

"Yes, the servants are all gone to bed," he said to himself. "She is gone too."

He drew a long sigh of relief, and came still carefully, but less noiselessly, down the last stairs.

Just before he reached the bottom he stopped suddenly and listened; was it fancy, or had he heard the slightest possible click in the handle of the dining-room door?

It must be fancy—there lay his hat on the hall bench; in another moment he should be safe in the street.

But before the thought had passed, the click

was repeated, and Adelaide Markham stood facing him.

She was very pale, but there was so much deep sorrow in her face, that the irritation he felt at sight of her was subdued as he looked closer.

His first impulse was to hold out his hand and say "Good-night;" Adelaide shook her head.

"I will not keep you long, if you will come in here, James."

As he followed her, he thought how differently Elinor would have spoken. She would have commanded and he should have obeyed in a rapture of delight, and yet it was something to know that he was all in all to this trembling, delicate-looking girl.

She began to speak at once, as soon as he had closed the door. She was afraid he would try to escape her.

"James—I want to tell you something. Perhaps I had better have done it before; but it seemed so mean and unworthy to grudge Elinor your liking—but—but—"

"Addy, my dear child!"—he took her hand

caressingly between both of his,—“ what is all this you are making yourself miserable about ? —some sad delusion, I am sure. Come, tell me what is the matter.”

She loved him so very dearly, that his quiet, calm words—for the sight of her growing agitation restored his self-control—seemed to convict her for an instant of exaggerated fancy ; but the memory of facts was too recent.

“ I don't want to complain,”—she tried to keep down her sobs, and partly succeeded, although large, swelling tears would blind her sight until they fell heavily over her cheeks on to his hand as it held hers—“ but is it not better to have a clear understanding ? ” He tried to interrupt her, but she dared not listen again. She knew she should be robbed of all power to say what she felt must be no longer delayed. “ Please let me speak, James—indeed I must,” she went on fast, the colour rising in her pale cheeks, with eagerness, for she scarcely believed he would let her say all she wanted. “ I always knew, when she came—your love must change ; —I think you have only cared for me because

you have known me a long time, and because there has been no one else here to care for, as a companion. Hush!" she laid her other hand on his arm, "I am not jealous of Elinor—it is only natural, it is perhaps a thing that must have happened, that you have become as fascinated by her as the rest of us have. But,"—she took her eyes off his face, for she knew what she had to say conveyed reproach, and she loved him too well not to shrink from the chance of wounding him,—“if you do love her, James, I should like you to say so openly to me—then—then—there could be no fear of any misunderstandings between you and me again.” She drew a deep breath, for the hardest part was said, and yet there was something still—she longed to ask him to give up the tender looks, the caressing words he had bestowed on her this very evening, when during Elinor’s first song she had tried to come to some explanation with him, and he had soothed her into silence.

But this was very bitter to her weak human nature, even though reason said these things were but seemings, and she would be happier

and better without them. How could she by her own act banish them for ever? She dared not face a future without his love—for what else had she been living all these months? But this Spartan effort was spared her.

James Fisher clasped the other hand with its fellow, and drew Adelaide close to him—

“My poor, dear girl, you are letting the morbid fancies I warned you against grow till they destroy your better judgment. Did you not, yourself, before your sister’s arrival, ask me to care specially for her as your sister, and afterwards, when you had seen her, you told me she required a great deal more attention and observance from men than you did, because she had always had it. Surely, my own dear little Addy, you are not jealous if I try to please her in obeying you, and then get drawn on by Elinor’s amusing talk to pay her sometimes too exclusive attention.” He stooped and kissed her forehead. It was a rare mark of affection, for they scarcely ever met alone, and Adelaide blushed and trembled, with the strange mixture of fears and pleasure that thrilled through her. “I suppose

all women, even the best of them, are alike," he said, smiling; "even my Adelaide is a little jealous."

"Oh, no, indeed."

But he went on—"It is not the women that are loved the best who get the most attention and devotion before others; their very good qualities prevent them from exacting it. Haughtier, more capricious natures must be waited on and studied and flattered, although they exhaust patience and seldom command respect."

After all, spite of her determined self-abnegation, it was very healing to her wounded heart that this slight shadow of blame should be cast on Elinor. She wondered it had never struck her that there were two sides to the question, and that Elinor might have so tried to engross his attention, that without being neglectful he had no choice left. This new light spread fast over the gloom of her sorrow, and when he whispered tenderly—"You quite see what I mean—do you not, love? and you'll not go on encouraging these foolish fancies, which must make us both un-

happy"—Adelaide felt that she had been unkind and unreasonable, and that James was all that was excellent and forgiving. She said so with a full heart as she wished him good-night. He took an affectionate farewell, without answering her words, but his face worked uneasily as he walked towards his chambers in the Temple.

Adelaide went back into the room and took her candle, then carefully glancing round her she closed the door gently and went upstairs. There was a look of peace, of content, on her face now that had not been there lately. She was wholly distrustful of herself, but she never doubted others. She did not attempt to examine or sift her lover's conduct; there might have been an underlying consciousness that it would not bear it; but she did not realise this. She could and would trust him implicitly—there was no use in looking back, when it was so happy to look forward. She had to pass Elinor's room on her way to her own, and she stopped before the door. Would it not be better, more honest, more sisterly even, to say plainly that she was engaged to James Fisher? No, she must not

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say that. James had always objected to the word; he said they must rest content with "understanding each other;" and besides, he had forbidden her to utter a word about it till he was able to speak openly to her father. But that was when no one else's happiness was risked by silence. Now it was very different. Thinking of him as Adelaide did, it seemed to her that Elinor would very soon love him dearly, if she were not warned; and besides, if her sister knew the terms they were on, would she try to attract him, as she had done to-night?

But this last reason for speaking seemed so mean and selfish, that she almost resolved to pass on in silence; and then it suddenly occurred to her that if she withheld all confidence from Elinor, she was not treating her like a sister in this matter. Besides, she knew very well that Elinor had seen her agitation; how much better to be open and honest at once.

She went into the room quickly, afraid of changing her mind again; but Elinor was not there. The French maid she had engaged since her arrival was sitting half asleep in her young

mistress's easy-chair. Adelaide did not stop to ask questions, but went swiftly upstairs to the little room she now shared with Mary.

Elinor was sitting shivering in the fireless room, wrapped in a blanket she had snatched from the bed.

"Oh, you tiresome child! I thought you were never coming, and I promised mamma to see if you were ill or not. Now, Addy, you'll please to tell me the truth; why did you go off in that white way this evening, making us all feel nervous?"

Adelaide had not counted on questions, and this was a very difficult one to set aside. She had not intended to touch on the grievance of the evening, but to let her sister draw what inference she chose from her confession.

She hesitated; but her straightforwardness helped her through her shyness.

"I'm so glad you're here, Nell dear; only we must whisper, or we shall waken little Mary. I went into your room to look for you—I've something to tell you, Elinor."

A guilty feeling brought the colour into her

sister's face. She was afraid of what Adelaide's next words might be.

"And I've something to tell you. I don't think it is proper for my younger sister to go off apparently to bed, while all the time she is holding stolen interviews downstairs."

It was impossible to know whether she spoke in play or earnest, but the way was smoothed for Adelaide's next words.

"Don't you, Nelly, dear?" She clasped her sister's arm with both hands, and laid her cheek on her shoulder, so as to escape the fixed gaze Elinor bent on her. "But you would not think it wrong or surprising, if I had told you, as I ought to have before, dear—but I was silly and afraid—that James and I are—" she stopped, for Elinor suddenly straightened herself, and releasing her arm, looked at her steadily—her eyes flashing.

"Adelaide, do you mean that you are engaged, and that you and all the rest have been keeping it a secret from me? It is the unkindest—I might say the basest—conduct I ever knew of." She went on passionately;

surprise, mortified vanity, and an uncomfortable sense of having been duped, lashing her on into one of the ungovernable tempests that still possessed her when her pride and self-love were deeply wounded. "No, Adelaide, I must go now; don't attempt to stop me; it is useless to affect sisterly confidence, when you let me suppose I could read your whole heart, and yet have been keeping all it held a secret."

If Adelaide had not been frightened she must have smiled as Elinor swept towards the door, still wrapped in her blanket, with the manner of a Medea. But the poor girl had never seen any woman in such a passion before, and she only felt how much blame rested on herself for giving pain to Elinor.

"Stay, Nell, dear—pray, pray listen: we are not really engaged, and no one knows anything about it,—we only understand each other." She went on more quietly as she saw her beginning to listen; "and James said I must not breathe a word to any one."

"Then why does he allow you to tell me? I'll have nothing more to say to him."

She spoke very haughtily, for she was furious at the deceit practised on her by Mr. Fisher. He had, then, so misinterpreted her condescension this evening as to think it better to permit Adelaide to give her this warning, to prevent her own affections from becoming too far entangled: it was, indeed, a piece of merciful consideration. Oh, if she could see him that instant and relieve herself of the scorn—the just wrath that was swelling her heart, till she felt nearly stifled.

"He has not allowed me. I am not sure he will like it when I tell him what I have done; only it seemed as if I must, Elinor."

Elinor had calmed slightly, but she was still too much excited to think of what she said, and it was a relief to vent her wrongs on some one.

"You would not have said a word about it if you had not been jealous, Adelaide; afraid—because I tried to be kind and cousinly to—to James Fisher"—it cost some trouble to speak of him civilly—"made an effort, indeed, to do so—that I wished to attract him to myself.

You never made a greater mistake ; he is the very last person who would take my fancy. But there is one thing I wish to say"—she had again turned towards the door, and now looked back at Adelaide, who stood shrinking beside Mary's bed, feeling there was too much truth in Elinor's words for her to deny them—"don't repeat to James Fisher what you have been telling me." She paused a moment to find a more valid reason than the first that had occurred to her rapid mind. "If neither papa nor mamma know of this arrangement, it seems much better to keep it secret from every one. I am a careless person in some ways, and if he knew what you have told me, I might perhaps find myself talking to him about you before mamma, and then think how she would be wounded to hear it from me first. I sha'n't go to bed till you have promised me this."

"But I always tell him everything."

"Oh, you silly child, he'd love you much better if you didn't. He's just the man who would prefer a woman who could manage her own mind and his into the bargain. If you

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lean on James Fisher, Addy, he'll soon get tired of you. Good night—no, no, I'm not angry with you now, but I hate scenes and explanations"—for Adelaide tried to throw her arms round her, looking utterly penitent and wretched. "Make haste, and get into bed as fast as you can, or you'll look as pale as a ghost to-morrow, and that wretched little Mary is awake."

Adelaide could not go to sleep so easily ; it was hard work finding out who had been right and who wrong, through this, to her, strangely eventful evening. It was much the easiest, and she believed the best way, to take all the blame on herself. She felt heavy-hearted ; her happiness with Elinor was disturbed : although both of them might keep from mentioning the subject, still it must lie there.

Elinor might have contrasted Adelaide's bed-chamber with her own warm, comfortable room, with its bright fire and toilet candles, standing ready lit on the pretty little table which her sister had decorated with muslin and lace trimming in her honour, but it never occurred to her to trouble herself about the sacrifices made

for her by others, neither did it occur to her now as she sat moodily in front of the fire while her maid uncoiled her magnificent length of hair, that she had been making her sister miserable to gratify her own vanity. She only inveighed mentally against Adelaide's folly in having entangled herself with a man without any prospects, and who she believed did not really care for her, while as to him—she was obliged to turn her thoughts forcibly to another subject to maintain even outward self-control.

The lively French girl who stood behind her brushing her hair made several efforts at conversation, but in vain; and when her mistress dismissed her, she declared to herself that "Miss Dryden, *était d'une fierté*," her shoulders supplied the rest of the sentence as she went away shrugging them nearly to her ears.

CHAPTER III.

RIVALRY.

“MISS DRYDEN and Miss Markham,” said Bunce, Mr. Brownlow’s boy, throwing open the door of Miss Jane Ann’s sitting-room.

Now Bunce had no business to have done, as his mistress would have said, “any such thing.”

He knew as well as boy could know that the drawing-room was the place for strangers he had never seen before ; for albeit a methodical, praise-worthy person in the way of keeping things and folks strict and straight, Miss Brownlow dearly loved to surround herself in her own

den with litter of all sorts, from loose sheets of MS., for she indulged in scribbling, to baskets full of grey flannel petticoats for the poor. But then Bunce, or Buttons, as he was sometimes called, was a self-willed youth of fifteen ; his mistress had, as he considered, injured his dignity by telling him that morning he was a very careless monkey for breaking a window, and he took his revenge now.

“ Bother the boy ! ”

Miss Brownlow could not suppress the exclamation. She was setting a despatch box of her brother's to rights, and the table was strewn with heterogeneous heaps of cork, pins, the skins and outer coverings of chrysalides, stray wings and legs of beetles and other insects, lumps of camphor,—all the refuse of last year's collection.

As Cecil came forward to greet her visitors while her aunt scrambled the rubbish into a heap, even Elinor, who rarely admitted the beauty of others, was struck by her charming face and manner.

Miss Jane Ann was enchanted with Elinor ;

and as usual, when she had made any new or pleasant discovery, her impulsive nature knew no rest till every one else was aware of it.

She jumped up suddenly.

"Excuse me, my dear, I'll be back directly."

Elinor thought she must be a little crazy. She turned to look at Cecil, who was telling Adelaide of her uncle's noble self-devotion to the inhabitants of Starby.

Tears glistened in the girl's eyes as she spoke, and Elinor's conscience pricked her a little. She had scarcely thought of Uncle Dryden's safety, or that he was incurring any special risk.

But now Miss Brownlow came rushing back, followed by her brother.

The sage bowed profoundly to his patron's niece; but, as Cecil at once saw, he was thinking of something else. He shook hands with the sisters, and then seemed not to know exactly what next was expected of him.

"We won't keep you, Erasmus, for I know you're busy. But now, do tell me, Miss Dryden," she caught his hand, and turned him

round full face to Elinor; "did you ever see two brothers so unlike? It is wonderful, isn't it? Ah, but it's a long while since you saw John Brownlow—isn't it, now?" She had become dimly conscious that it was not quite well to allude to Erasmus's superior looks before John's daughter; so she released her brother from Elinor's inspection.

He roused up sufficiently to ask how her uncle did, and to inquire for Mr. and Mrs. Markham. With all his abstraction, he was more alive to the courtesies of life than his voluble, ready-witted sister was. He began to perceive, also, that Miss Dryden was handsome; and he soon discovered, as every one else did, how very easy it was to talk to Elinor. She had quite the art of making *les frais* of a conversation, without taking the lion's share of it; and Erasmus, now wakened up, found himself in the midst of a lengthy account of his first impressions of Paris, when he suddenly saw the time by his sister's clock.

"Bless my soul, Jane Ann, that clock's surely wrong!" He had left off in the middle of a

sentence, and began tugging at an old gold watch, nearly as large as a bun, which had belonged to his great grandfather. "Dear me, dear me, I hadn't an idea it was getting on so. You will receive my excuses, young lady—stern duty calls me"—he made quite a courtly bow to Elinor; "the charm of your society has made me oblivious that I ought to have been at the British Museum by this time; my young friend will be waiting for me."

"What can you and Maurice be going to do at the British Museum again to-day?" Miss Brownlow was very much excited, or she would scarcely have called Erasmus to account before strangers.

He looked rather surprised.

"Well, my dear, it was the last visit that has caused this. We then saw"—he raised his finger and looked round, as if addressing an audience—"among a wondrous diversity of coleopteræ, two specimens, which I maintain to be wholly and totally distinct—the *Ilybius ater*, and the *Dyticus dimidiatus*—whereas my young friend persists, with all the ardour and

pertinacity of youth, that we saw but one insect—the *Dyticus*, and that what I noticed was merely an insignificant specimen of the same beetle. Now I am surprised”—Erasmus’s eyes sparkled, and he looked as eager as if the youthful qualities just named were not wholly confined to his pupil. He was close beside Elinor, and he grasped her arm, to enforce a hearing. “I am very much surprised to find that such a youth as Maurice Karse, with sense enough to give preference to the study of Coleoptera, over that of the more showy and attractive Lepidoptera, should fall into so superficial an error. But I must away, ladies—I go to convince him.”

This time he really did go—in such haste, that Elinor could not put the question that had been hovering on her lips ever since she heard the name of his pupil.

But directly the door was closed, it came.

“Did not your brother say, Miss Brownlow, that his friend’s name was Maurice Karse?”

“Yes; he is his pupil.”

“His pupil, oh?” She paused, as if not

quite decided on the prudence of saying more. "There used to be a boy of that name at Flairs, but this must be a different person."

Elinor's voice sounded so strangely meek, that Adelaide looked round at her in surprise ; but they were sitting beside each other, opposite to Miss Brownlow and her niece, so that she could see her sister's face.

Miss Brownlow looked up and down, and then at Cecil. There was no way of escape. She must tell the truth, and caution Elinor.

She spoke in a stage whisper :—

"Yes, it is the same, only your uncle, Mr. Dryden, does not wish anything special to be said about it ; therefore, perhaps, if you were to see him, or speak of him, you would not say I had mentioned it. He's a charming youth, and a thorough gentleman."

Elinor's eyes had followed Miss Brownlow's when she glanced at Cecil. The fair, earnest face had a slightly troubled expression, and now, as she darted another rapid glance, she saw a deep flush, either of confusion or vexation, overspreading it. The spirit of intrigue, born in

Elinor, and nourished by the talk and reading of her French governess, sprang up eagerly now on the scent of what she fancied was a discovery. Here was a romance far more interesting than Adelaide's. This quiet, sweet-looking, lady-like Cecil was certainly in love with the cousin of the gamekeeper at Flairs. She must, indeed, have refined taste.

Mingled with her sarcastic contempt was a feeling of injury. She had a prior right of interest in Maurice to any one. Ah, and if he saw her again, this would vindicate itself. She must be very careful not to betray her intimacy with him—he, for his own sake, would be mute. But how very strange her uncle's silence had been. She felt a sudden, incomprehensible dislike to Cecil: she spoke almost vehemently as she answered Miss Brownlow.

“Indeed! He must have altered very much since I remember him. He was quite ordinary and common, then.”

While she spoke the words, she knew, although they might be literally true, they were really false, and that there never could have

been anything "common" about Maurice Karse ; but she was too much annoyed to be just, and she wanted to crush something like shame into that mock-modest girl, who had so far forgotten herself as to fall in love with a gamekeeper's lad.

To her utter amazement, Cecil turned and looked her full in the face, with a self-possession she could not have maintained, had Elinor's surmise been a true one.

"I am surprised at that" — she spoke quietly ; "Mr. Karse seems such a very gifted person, that I should have thought he must always have been remarkable."

"Yes, he's very clever." Miss Brownlow saw how Elinor's face had darkened and contracted, and she tried to smooth matters. "Of course Erasmus has done wonders for him. He was very different, certainly, when he first came here ; but if you knew him, Miss Dryden, you would think him, I dare say, as charming as we do—he's quite a pet of mine. By-the-bye, I dare say he'd like to see you ; he's so fond of your uncle."

"Oh, no, thank you ; I don't suppose he'd

care about it. I should rather fancy"—Elinor gave another quick glance at Cecil, who sustained it unflinchingly; "that he would not care to be reminded of Flairs, if he is as much changed as you say; besides, I really know nothing of him. But come, Addy;" she rose, and went up to Miss Brownlow—"we are making quite a visitation, we must really say good-bye"—she forced her face into a smile as she approached Cecil, who had flushed almost angrily at her last sentence. "Good-bye, Cecil, we must try and be good neighbours when I go back to Flairs. It seems so very long since we have seen each other."

It was such a relief when she went away. Cecil had never felt her gentle nature so thoroughly stirred. Elinor had the peculiar faculty common to both bad and good people of rousing strife in the hearts of others; a chronic acerbity of manner will do this, and a nervous want of self-control also, but as frequently it is the bitter spring beneath, the secret, perhaps unknown jealousy, the want of charity which prompts us not to let our neighbour think too

well of him or herself, which creates that indescribable atmosphere of intercourse from which he goes away sore, ill-used, far more disposed to be vain and self-asserting than as if he had been more genially treated.

Cecil found her ideas in a tempest, whirled round and round with indignation at what she felt was unjustifiable pride and presumption.

She thought to herself how different Elinor's own lot in life would have been but for her Uncle Dryden, the contrast of Adelaide Markham's plain dress and quiet manner beside her showy stylish sister, had struck her forcibly.

But Cecil's anger never lasted, and she smiled now at the result her own strictures had led to ; the words she had spoken of Maurice Karse would have applied almost equally to Elinor Dryden ; in any sphere of life she must always have been remarkable. And her dislike would have been subdued, at any rate as much as was in the power of her weak human nature, if her aunt had been judicious.

“ What a fascinating person Miss Dryden is —so clever too ; she is positively witty at times.

How charmed your Uncle Erasmus was, and no wonder."

Cecil was surprised at her own cross contradictory feelings. She could not speak heartily, and so she remained silent.

Her aunt glanced up quickly—she saw clearly enough how the matter stood, so she told herself. Cecil was a very sweet girl, but after all she was "country," and had some provincial narrow-mindedness. There was almost a foreign ease about Elinor's manner which had alarmed her niece's simplicity; it would be well to point out the advantage of such an acquaintance.

"It will be very pleasant for you, my dear child, when you return to Flairs, to have so agreeable a neighbour; she will brighten up the whole county, or I am much mistaken."

"She is a very stylish person," and there Cecil stopped, feeling too unlike herself, and too dissatisfied at what she considered her own jealousy of Elinor Dryden, to be an agreeable companion for her lively aunt.

Most fortunately some fresh visitors, shown this time into the drawing-room, required Miss

Brownlow's presence, and she and Cecil did not meet again till tea-time, when Maurice and Erasmus maintained so unbroken a discussion on the subject of water-beetles, that Elinor's visit was forgotten. It was amusing to see how far more cool and self-possessed the young disputant was than the old one; while Erasmus reddened and spluttered in his eagerness to get out the long sonorous Latin words by which alone he condescended to mention the tiny creatures under argument, Maurice sat smiling in amused patience: he considered that opinion had as much right to two sides on general subjects, as his coat had, and therefore, although he felt confident of the correctness of his own, he thought his tutor's ought to be listened to.

Cecil noted this. Elinor's words had made her study Maurice with unusual attention this evening; there might be a slight roughness of manner about him, and also a want of ready attention to the little courtesies of life, but this last seemed to proceed quite as much from his habits of dreamy reverie, as from ignorance. She began to justify herself for her irritation,

and to decide that Elinor was presumptuous and mistaken. At seventeen it does not take long to transform liking into admiration. She could not help pitying Maurice as he sat opposite to her ; his beautiful brown eyes were scarcely melancholy now, so mirthful was the glance that beamed from them, as he looked occasionally at Cecil and her aunt, to see if they were following the discussion.

And then she asked herself what he was to be pitied for. Gifted, handsome, in a fair way of possessing all the attainments of a scholar and a gentleman, with health and strength to carve his own road through the world ; was she so foolish as to pity him because a girl like herself—for what else was Elinor—chose to fling the reproach of humble birth—that she supposed was what she meant—at him, as if on the contrary such an overcome impediment would not rather increase by contrast, the lustre of any greatness he might achieve.

And yet although she wound this reasoning up to a period, she pitied him still—and she could not tell why, something seemed to warn

her from seeking the reason, and also to warn her—as the servant entered the room with letters and disturbed her reverie, that she had been thinking about Maurice Karse, a great deal more than was necessary.

She looked up and met her aunt's penetrating eyes, she could not help blushing deeply, but the letters caused an immediate diversion of attention. One was for Cecil, the other for Miss Brownlow, both from the aunt at Oxford. She said she was growing very fidgety about her dear brother John—alone in the midst of the fever, and that she thought Cecil ought not to be so far away from him at such a time. She did not wish her to return to Starby, but as Oxford was so much nearer to the village than London was, it would be much better for her niece to join her, till the fever had passed away.

The idea was sensible, and had Miss Mary Brownlow been so too, it would have been much better, but she was more of a worry than her sister Jane Ann, with less intellect. Her letter to Cecil was so interspersed with dark hints and words, scored under, that the poor girl began to

feel miserable that she had been induced to leave her father at all. She wanted to return to Starby at once, but Miss Brownlow was sturdy in her refusal.

"You shall go to Oxford, dear, to-morrow, if you wish, but it would be sheer madness to return to Starby; besides, it would be in direct opposition to your father."

Cecil said she should be glad to go at once to Aunt Mary, and then she rose and left the room, saying something about packing. Her uncle remonstrated with his sister for allowing her to depart in such haste.

Miss Brownlow nodded and frowned, and with sundry jerks of her head towards Maurice, who was standing with his back towards them, pondering in his own mind the chances of Cecil's return to the drawing-room, she made the sage understand she could give him good reasons for her conduct if she thought proper so to do—and if they were alone.

At least this was what he understood, being but a man. Had he been female, he would doubtless have guessed that this pantomime re-

ferred also to Maurice, and that Jane Ann was most anxious to get Cecil out of the way of his fascinations.

Her niece's spirited defence of him to Elinor, her long musing fit, and sudden blush just now, had determined the strong minded spinster that Cecil was just like any other girl, and fancied herself "in love" with Maurice Karse, while she believed he didn't care two straws about her, and this was putting—as she expressed it—"the cart before the horse," and must be remedied.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD COMPANIONS.

MISS BROWNLOW would have pronounced herself a prophet if she could have seen Maurice a few evenings later. He did not see Cecil again. He had to attend a lecture next morning, and when he came in, he found she had just started for the Railway Station with her uncle and aunt.

It seemed as if all the light of his life had gone out, or as he felt truly, he had never lived before ; he could not go back to the tame emotionless existence he had led before her bright presence came amongst them.

His tutor found him strangely absent and

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dreamy ; he seemed to have lost all taste for his usual pursuits.

A few days after her departure, as he was walking silently beside Mr. Brownlow, that gentleman came to a dead stop.

"God bless my soul, my dear Miss Dryden, you must excuse my not having perceived you afar. I am—well"—he dropped his voice to a whisper, "just the least in the world near-sighted, or such a mistake would not have occurred."

Elinor smiled. She was very well dressed, walking had given her a slight colour, and her eyes sparkled with animation. Maurice looked at her in surprise, he could not believe this to be the thin dark-faced girl he had known years ago, but he was far less changed, and Elinor knew him at once.

Cecil's manner about him had excited her curiosity, but she had not expected to see any one like Maurice. She was walking with Adelaide, the French maid a few yards behind, in one of the quiet old-fashioned squares near the British Museum, so they could stay and chat for

a few minutes without fear of interruption with Mr. Brownlow and his pupil.

Had the meeting been in a room, or before keen observers, Elinor might have felt puzzled how to act, now she merely followed her impulses. She turned from Erasmus just as he was beginning to speak.

"You don't remember me, Maurice?"

She smiled, and held out her hand.

It seemed to the youth as if the great bugbear of his life—his early acquaintance with Miss Dryden—had suddenly vanished. What could there be unpleasant in memory beneath such a smile as that and such a frank greeting?

He answered it as frankly.

"Yes, I recollect you now, Miss Dryden, but you are a good deal changed."

"For the better it is to be hoped, in all ways," she said, laughing. The youth's look and manner had fascinated her with the old power of former days. Then after a few more words had passed, she gave him one of her witching smiles. "Will you come and see us, Maurice? Mamma will be so glad to see you

any evening. Will you come to-morrow? You can perhaps give me later Starby news than I have received."

"No, indeed—I am rather uneasy at not getting any news; but I shall be very glad to call on you, Miss Dryden, as you are so kind as to ask me."

And before Erasmus could condense his wonder and curiosity into words, Elinor had given the address of her father's house, shaken hands with both gentlemen, and passed on; but almost before she was out of hearing, Erasmus recovered his scattered wits and poured forth question upon question with such rapidity and excitement, that there was no chance of reply until he had fairly run himself down.

How on earth had Maurice ever become acquainted with the Squire's niece? and what did she mean by calling him Maurice? and did he think he was wise in mixing himself up with a family like the Markhams, people whom the Squire disliked? and sundry other questions and remarks, which amused Maurice while they annoyed him.

His tutor was very much vexed at the result of the meeting. Elinor's ready recognition had renewed the charm of her first appearance, and he was just meditating some recondite speech, when suddenly she had turned all her looks and words to Maurice, and he had been forced to stand by and say something civil to Adelaide Markham, which, sage though he was, he would much have preferred saying to her brilliant sister. A shy, awkward man himself, he shrank from timid, nervous women with a mixture of fear and dislike; he felt himself ill-used by their inability to set him at ease; he pitied Adelaide now for letting his sentence fall to the ground uncombated by one of the graceful nothings with which Elinor would have drawn it into an amusing war of words. All this had been vexing, but this was nothing to the fact that Maurice had accepted Miss Dryden's invitation. What was to be done? He was the youth's tutor; but how could he forbid his intercourse with others? or even if he could be so uncourteous, would Maurice, at twenty years of age, consent to be treated like a child? and yet Mr.

Dryden had hinted that he wished him to be kept out of Roland Markham's way.

He knew next to nothing of the previous intercourse that had existed between the Squire and his *protégé*. The former wrote only dry, brief business letters inquiring into the youth's progress, and testifying his approbation at the report received, in the enclosure of the half-yearly cheque; it was possible that Maurice might have been admitted at Flairs as the play-fellow of Miss Dryden, when they were both children. But they were not children now, and either the sight of Elinor had awakened an unusual interest in her future, or he was much more astute than he had proved himself respecting the daily association of his niece Cecil with Maurice Karse.

He wished Jane Ann were at home to consult with. However, Elinor had a mother who surely ought to know about proprieties and those "sort of frailties," as he termed them.

His curiosity tried in various ways to learn the extent of Maurice's previous acquaintance with Elinor; but he had roused the youth's

pride, and with it a reserve that baffled all inquiries, so that he saw him sally forth the next evening, without having gained from him any satisfactory information. He consoled himself by writing to Mr. Dryden.

Mrs. Markham had shown herself very desirous to surround Elinor with all the little observances that she considered requisite for a Dryden. If she did not walk out with her daughter herself, she took care she should always have a maid with her, thereby eliciting the pertness of little Mary, who asked if Elinor did not behave as well in the street as Addy, who could always go out alone. But in one respect Northover would have pronounced Mrs. Markham sadly deficient. She greatly preferred sitting over the fire downstairs with her husband to playing propriety in the drawing-room with her daughters. And Roland Markham was so eager to give his scheme fair play, that he generally contrived to make her stay with him longer than usual, when he knew James Fisher had arrived.

Elinor did not think it necessary to tell her

mother she had invited Maurice, and Adelaide was so full of regained happiness, that she only counted the hours, and found the day unusually long and wearisome till evening. James, perhaps, would come, and she forgot everything else in this hope.

He had come to Ashe Street once since her explanation with him, and had devoted himself entirely to her. It is possible that Elinor might not have been so determined to improve her acquaintance with Maurice Karse, if she had not begun to find her evenings dull. She was too much offended with her cousin to seek to please or attract him, and she told herself magnanimously that she was making a sacrifice of her own amusement to Adelaide's happiness; for of course she had only to smile, or even address him specially, and James Fisher would return to his allegiance.

When Maurice arrived, Mr. Markham was asleep, and as the maid who had received her orders from Elinor showed the strange gentleman at once to the drawing-room, without announcing his arrival downstairs, Mrs. Mark-

ham concluded that it was only James Fisher, and went on with her knitting.

Maurice found Elinor alone, and in a few minutes she had made him feel quite at home, and as if she were some very old and dear friend. She completely ignored all that had been painful in their previous intercourse.

“ It seems so natural to call you Maurice. You must tell me if you prefer me to say Mr. Karse.”

She said this as she heard what she thought was James Fisher's knock, when she knew their *tête-à-tête* would soon be interrupted. The smile that went with the words was very intoxicating. But something, he could not tell what, in the sound of his own name, stirred Maurice painfully; it seemed to bring back a dim vision of Elinor's former haughtiness, and to warn him against the passionate admiration that was mastering his senses. He had been sitting with her nearly an hour, and it had passed like a moment. He did not know how, but he had been drawn into speaking of himself, of his pursuits, and of his future, with very unusual openness; for Maurice rarely spoke of

himself. He was reticent by nature, and he had never till lately lived among women.

Before he could thoroughly awaken to this indistinct warning, Elinor had turned from greeting James Fisher who came into the room with Adelaide, and again devoted herself to his amusement, and her pleasure in this was the greater when she saw her cousin's eyes straying every now and then across the room, even when he ought to have been listening to Adelaide. It was a triumph to show that she was quite independent of him, and not obliged to play third, as she had been the last time he came.

She had not introduced the two young men, and Maurice presently asked who he was.

Elinor hesitated. She knew that Maurice must have remarked the other's stolen glances and restless manner, and she resolved that it was better to tell him Adelaide's secret. She would perhaps have found it difficult to offer a good reason for this confidence. She thought she was condescending to Maurice Karse; it would have seemed too ridiculous to own that he exercised some strange power over her.

"If you won't tell any one, I'll tell you a secret."

Maurice smiled. "I have never kept a secret yet," he said ; "I suppose I have not the faculty."

"I should think quite the contrary ; you have a stronger character than most men, I am sure : now listen—that is my sister's promised husband."

She put her lips close to his ear—he felt the light pressure of her hair against his own.

The slight action seemed to give her flattering words a warmer character—it made him believe that what she had been telling him was true in a deeper sense than he had at first thought, that she had never forgotten him, and had always looked on to the time when she might claim him again as her friend.

Maurice was not vain, but he must have been a very unnatural youth of twenty if he could have resisted Elinor's winning manner and the flattering notice she lavished on him. It was the first time he had been so singled out ; for although he had accompanied Miss Brownlow

to a few stiff tea-parties, he had scarcely mixed at all with young people, and he had never met with any one like Elinor.

He had seen Cecil Brownlow, and he had begun to love her—but this was a different feeling; his nature was stirred in a different fashion : Cecil was so much younger, and she had never given him cause in any way to think that she cared specially for his society. But he quite forgot her now. He was at the age when it is most flattering to be sought, and he had just the disposition which would be slow in seeking the regard of others—he had no vanity to minister to, but he had two weak points, pride and reserve. Elinor was scarcely older than he was—yet her intercourse with the outer world had given her the advantage of several years' experience. It was very gratifying to be treated as an equal by one whom he honestly acknowledged as his superior.

It was the sudden blinding intoxication that many of us must suffer, which we believe to be sober earnest, and it gave a brightness to his eyes, and an ardour to his manner that strengthened the charm of his presence to

Elinor. Both of them started as from some delicious dream, when Roland Markham and his wife came upstairs.

Elinor saw an angry flash in her father's eyes, as he took in quickly the respective distribution of the four young people, and then looked hard at her for explanation—but she was neither abashed nor frightened.

“This is an old acquaintance of mine, Papa—Mr. Karse, a friend of Mr. Brownlow.”

Mr. Markham bowed stiffly, and Maurice thought Elinor's father, a very uncourteous, disagreeable person, but her mother's kind greeting soothed him, and for a little while the evening went on peacefully.

Roland Markham stood on the hearth-rug, looking gloomy and discontented, while Elinor sang, and Maurice turned the leaves. When the song was ended, and even while the youth was imploring her to sing another, he turned abruptly to Adelaide, and told her to go and play a duett with her sister, “and I think you might turn over the leaves this time, James; you seem to have grown lazy.”

He spoke in a sharp, satirical tone; it was impossible not to see that he was vexed. Adelaide rose in eager obedience, her lover followed her, and Maurice yielded up his place.

He did it very unwillingly—he thought Roland Markham was treating them all like a pack of children, and he had no mind to submit to such tyranny.

It was plain Mr. Markham had merely asked for music in order to speak to him unheard by the others, for he began almost as soon as he had engaged him in conversation.

“Where did you know my daughter formerly, Mr. Karse?”

The question was so abrupt, that Maurice scarcely knew how to answer it, without hesitation, but the sneer his delay produced drew it out more quickly than he intended.

“I knew Miss Dryden at Flairs.”

“Indeed!” this was said very insultingly; for Roland Markham began to fear that his brother-in-law had been working secretly, too, and that his scheme had been forestalled. “I never heard of you from Elinor either.”

Maurice's eyes flashed.

"Probably not," he said; "we were both very young, and did not see much of each other."

"And may I ask whether you still live in the country, or whether you are fixed in London?" He said this more civilly—the youth's manner warned him that bullying would not serve his purpose.

"I am with my tutor, Mr. Brownlow, at present, in Bedford Place."

"Do you intend to go up to Oxford, or what line in life do you mean to choose?"

He was resolved to find out what position this boy held, for he now quite believed him to be a scion of one of the families in Mr. Dryden's county. After all, although he did not choose him to pay court to Elinor, it might be worth while to make the acquaintance of "a rich young swell," as he mentally classed him.

"I don't know," said Maurice, hurriedly; then resolving to break through the false position in which he found himself, he said—

“My future depends chiefly on Mr. Dryden, of Flairs—I owe him very much already.”

Roland Markham started, gave him a sharp, searching glance. “Mr. Dryden!” he said, and then turning away, uttered a long, low whistle.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASH GLEN.

TWICE during the week, and twice each Sunday, Mr. Brownlow assembled the villagers for Divine worship in the Ash glen.

It was a very deep, narrow ravine, open at one end to the sea, and spreading away at the other into the rocky downs which surrounded it; one of the marvellous fissures one sees in wild thinly habited districts, so jagged and broken that it almost seemed as if the mighty yawn by which it had been opened to the light of day, had been recent, and that by a reverse process the scattered and picturesque masses of

rock which rose abruptly from the earth like the ruins of a primæval temple, might be again swallowed up into oblivion, like the castle of St. John.

But there was one token which marked that years had gone by since Nature had made this deep furrow on the fair landscape—half-way up the precipitous side of the glen, behind a lofty, grey boulder, stood a magnificent ash tree, spreading its feathery branches on all sides as if proudly conscious of its undisputed empire. It was leafless now, but the swelling buds could already be traced along the graceful branches.

The sharp-pointed crag below had been severed by some storm or crash into portions, one of which had broken off midway, and lay at the foot of the whole mass, forming an easy access to the horizontal surface its fracture had created.

On this natural pedestal, the sharp outline of the jutting crag on his right hand, and the ash tree behind him, its branches canopying his head, Mr. Brownlow knelt, robed in his sur-

plice ; he was uttering the petition in the Litany, —“ In all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth, in the hour of death, and in the day of Judgment,”—and with the responses of the congregation, swelling up to where he stood, were mingled suppressed sobs.

The villagers were ranged below, each a few feet apart, except where there was more than one member of a family present—these knelt together ; in many instances only two or three survivors out of a large group of children.

Mr. Dryden was kneeling and slightly facing the villagers, and exactly facing the clergyman. His clear, piercing voice led the responses of the rest. As the “ We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord,” rose again in mournful cadence, the women and children gave a wailing sound to the supplication breathed forth so earnestly by the deep, strong voices of the men, and the lapping waves on the shingle, faintly heard at the end of the gorge, seemed a melancholy echo of all.

The prayers ended, Mr. Brownlow rose and gave out the words of the hymn, “ Rock of Ages.” It rose slowly at first, but gradually as

the singers began to feel the application of the words to their own state of trial and sorrow, they sang it with a fervour and an intensity of expression that overpowered the lapping of the far-off waves on the shingly beach.

There was a deep stillness, and then all bent their heads as their pastor addressed them "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

"And now, Lord, what is my hope? Truly, my hope is even in Thee."

This was Mr. Brownlow's text, a verse so sadly familiar to those who had been listening to it during the past week spoken over what remained of their loved departed; for although no concourse was permitted near the graves of the fever-stricken, the members of each family assembled in the entrance of the churchyard, and listened to the burial service, while the carts which held the coffins toiled up to a high hill-side overlooking the sea, far from any human vicinity.

The women, many of whom had lost husband or children—in some cases both—sobbed

and shuddered as he began, and many of the men drew their hands across their eyes, as bitter and tender feelings strove for expression, but before he had finished his brief, simple address, a holy calm, a hushed stillness spread over them all—the preacher's words had taken them out of themselves and their narrow range of care, and dread, and forethought—he had shown them that prayer is ever answered in the way that is best, and that this trial would be removed from them when it had accomplished its work.

He gave them his blessing, and while they still knelt in prayer Mr. Dryden felt some one touch his arm. He started—he was kneeling on a broken crag not easily accessible when already occupied. He turned his head without rising, and saw that a tall woman, her head muffled in a shawl, had succeeded in touching his arm by mounting over a broken stone.

He rose quietly, and signed to the woman to follow without disturbing the kneeling people.

It was impossible to descend to the bottom of the glen without following a sheep-track that led in a zigzag direction toward the sea, but

upwards there was a tolerably straight path which led almost in a perpendicular line to the range of downs overhead.

Mr. Dryden signed to the woman to precede him. He imagined her to have come on some errand of life and death from the village, and he marvelled at the daring route she had chosen, for the villagers reached the glen by a sloping road which wound along its whole extent, about a hundred feet above the river, through the ravine.

But as he followed her he became conscious of a strange familiarity in the woman's figure; long before they reached the top, he felt sure that it was Northover, the housekeeper at Flairs.

The scenes of sorrow, and suffering, and self-denying devotion he had been living amongst had worked strange changes in the Squire's stern, suspicious nature: it would be truer to say these had fostered the softening influence produced by his reconciliation to the friend of his youth, but he was far from meekness still, and his anger rose instantly at such a flagrant act of disobedience.

He restrained the expression of it till they both reached the table land at top, and as suppressed wrath is rarely modified in the process of restraint, he looked stern enough when he turned round and faced Northover, to have frightened a less determined woman.

But she was blessed with that triple shield of self-assurance, self-conceit, and bluntness of feeling, which makes women thus gifted invulnerable. She confronted her master with the air of a heroine.

"He's dying, sir—at least, I'm so told. I don't pretend to have seen him myself—not I. I remembered your pertickler injunctions respecting fevers and such like; but still, hearing he was dying, and knowing it might be soon just as well as not, it did seem my dooty, at the risk of mortal life and limb, to make known his dying wishes in respect of you, sir."

"Who is dying, Northover?—You have not come here to tell me that the fever has reached Flairs? What business have you here at all? you whom I left in charge of the rest. I cannot tell you how surprised and displeased I am."

There is no possibility of saying what the housekeeper felt; she and her feelings had long been accustomed to keep their own secrets, but a slight tinge of colour on her sallow cheeks might have been brought there by her master's rebuke. His impatient manner hurried her answer.

"Well, no, sir, not in the house." She took no notice of the rebuke, considering that the only part of his sentence intended for her could be the question as to the fever. She always made allowance for men; their heads were not balanced as well as her own.

Putting the well-adjusted member on one side she looked at him with her sharp, glittering eye.

"I'm thankful to say we've no fever at Flairs; not that it would have stopped there if it had come. There's ways—you know, sir, there's ways"—here the sharp eyes winked with superior intelligence, but she saw the Squire's lips trembling with an interruption—"it's Benjamin, sir, that I came about—Mr. Karse, as some of the servants call him."

"What of him? — Tell me at once, for Heaven's sake."

The Squire's agitation moved her at last; she had forgotten all the stories she had heard of the strong attachment that existed between her master and his gamekeeper. To her Mr. Karse had always seemed a very proud, "up-pish" kind of person, quite above his place, and not knowing how to treat a superior female.

"Well, sir, they do say he has the fever—at least, the poor old creature who works for him told the gardener so this morning—and said that some one—I forget who—had told her to mention it two days before, but she was afraid to go up to the house."

"And why could not you have sent one of the men here, instead of coming yourself? there would have been far less risk for the gardeners than for one who lives in the house itself."

While he spoke, he had turned towards the village, but then seeming suddenly to remember, he paused.

"Stay, you had better go back straight to

Flairs, send a supply of such things as are necessary for Karse to the bridge in two hours' time ; and, Northover, change your own clothing before you mix with the rest of the household ; that will do—I have no time to lose."

He hastened on, leaving his housekeeper speechless.

"Change my clothes ! perhaps the Squire 'd better have come home and changed 'em for me—pack of nonsense, just as if a fever's to be took in the open air ; and not a word about the way I managed to avoid the people by scrambling down and up, more like a cat than a Christian—but bless you, there's some as has but three senses, and some as has got those as the others don't miss."

So Northover returned to Flairs, feeling herself an unappreciated martyr—perfectly ignoring the truth, that she had eagerly snatched at the first opportunity of seeing the "field-preaching," as she termed it ; for although actual intercourse had been prohibited, in some way or other rumours of what was happening in the village reached the gate-keeper's lodge, on the Starby

side of the park, and Northover's indignation had waxed dire and dreadful when she learned that though "an unconsecrated dummy," like Tomkins, the steward, was thought good enough to minister to *her* soul, "the low-lived people of Starby had reg'lar service in a surplice, when they'd much better have been at home, minding their sick."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SQUIRE'S NURSING.

Two days and two long sleepless nights had passed since Mr. Dryden bent his head to enter Karse's cottage. When he reached his old servant's bedside, Ben lay in a stupor, which the old woman, who seemed to have established herself as nurse, said had lasted nearly all day. From her answers he very soon made out that the patient, if left to her tendance, would be suffered to die without loss of time, as she wound up all her information with the assertion that "it were useless to fret a dyin' soul—it were the Lord's will to take him."

The Squire left her as he had found her, half-asleep over the wood fire, and mounting the uneven, creaking stairs again, he stood, thinking over the different women in Starby, husbandless and childless now, whose sad experience would qualify them for fever-nurses—but a groan and then a violent movement of the hitherto senseless form on the bed, made him step nearer. In a few moments more he had to exert his utmost strength to keep Ben from dashing himself against the wall of the cottage, as he called, in a wild, shrieking voice, for Maurice—his boy—his child. But as Mr. Dryden bent over him, fearful of a return of the paroxysm, the muttered ravings that succeeded his first wild outcry filled him with sudden dread. Horrible as was the aspect of poor Ben's face, with its blackened lips and blood-shot eye-balls, the deathly white of the Squire's was even more appalling; beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead while he grasped at the bedclothes, as if for support. Gradually the muttering ceased, and stupor again fell on the sufferer, but before an hour had passed the

Squire went down again into the room below, and giving the woman a note hastily written in pencil, told her to go to Starby as fast as possible, and fetch the doctor whose name was outside the note. The doctor came, and was electrified when the Squire announced his intention of nursing the patient himself, without any assistance but that of the old woman whom he had found in the cottage.

He was such a patient, gentle nurse; the days and nights passed, alternating between heavy stupor, during which stimulants and restoratives had to be administered without the patient's volition or consciousness, and sudden raving fits, which sometimes taxed the Squire's strength severely; Ben addressed him frequently as his wife, his darling Ailsie, and then bade her suddenly go to help the madam, the poor lady, whose husband had deserted her. Then the whiteness returned to Mr. Dryden's face, and sometimes he stretched out his hand as if, forgetting the weakness of the raving man, lying there helpless, he would stifle the words before they could again be uttered.

But one day there came a steadier look in the patient's eyes. Instead of the fixed, sightless stare, or the wild, restless glances of the last few days, they seemed to rest on the different objects in the room, and take in their reality. Mr. Dryden's lips quivered as he saw Ben's glance gradually travelling round to where he sate, at his bed-head; would he recognise him? and if he did how would it be? had those accusations been mere delirious fancies, or had facts, which he believed known to himself alone, now become so public as to have reached his faithful servant in the distorted form in which he had uttered them?

The wistful, seeking eyes had reached his face; they looked long and earnestly, then they brightened, and a faint smile broke out over the disfigured features. The lips moved, but even when the Squire bent his head down close, he could scarcely hear the words—

“God bless you, Master Wentworth.”

He never heard his own name now—how could he—all of near kin had left him; the only living flesh and blood belonging to him, his

sister, he had resolved not to see again ; this might have made the sound impressive, but there was another reason for the heart-wrung anguish that spread over his face.

He thought Ben was dying,—it was only the third time he had stood by a death-bed, and each time he had been—ah, how well he remembered it—called on by his Christian name. A visible shudder, mingled with the anguish—those two dying appeals could never be forgotten—what would this be ? If it were what he dreaded—even though it should prove Ben's last request, he would not, he could not promise to grant it, he must be left to himself ; he could not be urged on beyond his nature. But the blackened, parched lips moved again, and Mr. Dryden, roused to the perception that he was neglecting his self-imposed duties. He moved gently away, and returning with the peculiar quietness some men have in sickness, he put a restorative to Ben's mouth.

The sick man drank eagerly, then he spoke ; this time his voice was distinct, though feeble.

"Thank you, many times, sir, for all you've done, and forgive me, Squire, for many's the hard thought I've had against you, though I always loved ye." He stopped here, and Mr. Dryden said gently, "Oh, hush, Ben; no need of that:" but there was an eagerness in Karse's face that could not be mistaken, and the Squire did not try to check him when he went on again in broken sentences—

"Squire, it's Maurice I think about, maist, that puir lad, he has ne'er done ye an ill turn—he've done vera handsome by him in the way of learning, but a crumb o' love's worth all that, and mair."—He stopped, exhausted; still Mr. Dryden did not try to check him. The Squire's eyes gleamed with excitement, and his face was very pale; it seemed as if he were determined to plumb the depths of Ben's secret knowledge; he put the stimulant to his lips again. The eyes brightened, and the lips seemed unglued from their rigidity. Mr. Dryden bent down his head to listen.

"He's had nane to love but mysel', and now I'm leavin' him—won't you try to love the lad a

wee, Squire, for my sake?—gifts choke us when they're all crust, with no loving words to make the crumb." A glimpse of sudden strength came upon him, and he stretched out his shaking, thin hand to seek his master's.

Mr. Dryden clasped it warmly in his ; but Ben must have the assurance in words.

"Won't you try to love him?—You'd not find it hard, if you knew the lad's heart."

His poor, weak fingers tried to press the Squire's. The light faded out of his eyes ; he lay wan and exhausted, with still the same, beseeching gaze.

Mr. Dryden turned his head aside. He could not bear that even Ben should see the agitation throbbing in every feature. It robbed him of all calmness, all the characteristic dignity which, however kind he might have been, had till now come between him and his old servant. There was a complaint in his voice as he answered Ben's appeal—the wounded human utterance of man to man—in self-justification, where he feels harshly judged.

"I will always be his best friend—have I not

shown myself so? You are hard upon me, Karse; love must come by nature."

He looked round as he spoke, and the satisfied expression told him he had said enough.

There was perfect silence long afterwards. The Squire sat forgetting his patient, one elbow resting on the bolster, his face nearly hidden in the up-turned hand, while Ben lay so very still, that it might have been thought his spirit had departed.

But it was not so. When the doctor's step below roused Mr. Dryden from what had been plainly very painful thoughts, he saw that his patient lay in a deep, refreshing sleep.

The doctor said it was possible that danger was over, and that he might recover if he did not sink from weakness; and he took his leave, not without telling the Squire how much his absence had been felt in Starby.

He need not have reminded him. The Squire's anxiety had not been wholly on Ben's account. Whispering all through the watchful days and nights had come the wearying question, whether he were justified in leaving his charge and au-

thority over the many for the sake of one, be he ever so highly valued? and then came the stinging doubt—was all this vigilance and zeal, which outsiders would set down to his noble devotion to an old and faithful retainer inspired by any higher motive than fear—fear lest the ravings, exaggerated as he knew them to be, should become the common talk of the county? A few years before, he would have regarded any rumour with disdain—as a thing only fitly treated when trampled into the mire it sprang from. But now there were reasons why he wished, if the truth must be told, to be his own spokesman, and not to be falsely prejudged in the minds of men.

He went back to Ben's bed-side. The muscles of the face had relaxed; the breathing, though deep, was regular and easy. The crisis must be passed. There could be no longer any fear of delirium.

He glanced round the room, to see that all the patient needed was at hand, and then went quietly down-stairs. He laid his injunctions on the old woman not to leave the cottage till his

return, and bade her go up every now and then and look at Mr. Karse ; telling her what to do in the event of his awakening.

Then he started for Starby. The fresh free air almost overpowered his relaxed muscles. It seemed as if the way lengthened before him. He was thoroughly exhausted before he reached the Parsonage.

CHAPTER VII.

A DREAM.

MAURICE KARSE walked home from Mr. Markham's house, swayed by a rising tempest of ungovernable feeling. He had never felt the two extremes of pleasure and pain so keenly. He told himself as he hurried along, heedless of any obstacles he might meet, that the few last hours had been like Heaven and Hell.

And with the proneness we all have to think of our injuries rather than to reckon our benefits, he felt that the bliss of Elinor's presence had been effaced by her father's insolence. He went on angry, dissatisfied with himself for not

having silenced him more haughtily ; but how could he ? and, besides, he shrank from a quarrel with Elinor's father.

The sound of a church clock striking eleven warned him. He had told Mr. Brownlow he should be home early.

But when he reached Bedford Place, he found that the sleepy sage had already gone to bed ; the whole house seemed asleep ; there was not a sight or a sound to come between him and his painful remembrance of what had happened.

Yes, there was something. He passed his hand across his forehead, as if to clear away the weariness that oppressed him ; and he thrilled with delight as the long, warm clasp in which Elinor had let him hold her soft, slender hand came back to his remembrance. What a glorious creature she was ! How could he think of the petty annoyances he had undergone when she had called him her friend—had even accepted his admiration ! for Maurice was conscious that he had never dared to look at any woman before, as he had that night looked at Elinor Dryden.

How long would it be before he could see her again—before he could sun himself in that exquisite smile that had seemed to wrap his senses in bliss, or watch those graceful movements, and the brilliant play of expression in every feature? He felt that he could scarcely pass another day away from Elinor; and then the remembrance of her father returned, and he snatched his candle, and rushed up to his bedroom, reckless of the slumbers of his tutor.

He reached his room, and set down his light; and he felt there was no use in going to bed. He could not sleep with all these tangled circumstances surrounding him, like the meshes of a spider's web. Love, in the fiery madness of the passion, throbbed in his veins, and he knew it—knew that he loved Elinor Dryden, the daughter of a man who had insulted him, and the niece of his benefactor—of the Squire, who would as soon dream of giving him Flairs itself, as of permitting him even to address her as an equal.

For a few minutes he struggled to be free, but the elixir worked too strongly. The re-

membrance of Elinor's last glance, of that hand clasp, came back, soothing with delicious sweetness the restless disquiet. Yes, he would win her! There was a noble independence about her that vouched for her perfect truth. She loved him—was not that enough? And Maurice's heart bounded with a passionate joy, that almost forced tears from his eyes, as he thought of what Elinor's love must be.

He sat down, and tried to see his position. He could not, he would not, if he could, win her as her uncle's dependent; he must be free, and how was this to be? Not for a moment did Maurice think of asking help from any one. He would consult Mr. Brownlow; he knew that there were scholarships to be tried for, means by which he might fit himself to instruct others, for a time, till his pen should achieve for him his own future. This had been a day-dream for months past, but now it stood up as a fact to be realised. And Elinor, she would wait, she would be his best genius—his inspiration; they would lead together that poet life so fascinating to young dreamers, and per-

haps so really true in its blessing, to hearts which keep no craving corner for worldly vanities.

But there was present difficulty to face. He could not continue in a false position with Roland Markham, and yet he shrank from exposing his history to a man whose coarseness had shown itself so plainly ; and, after all, what could he tell him really about himself ?

Maurice had often thought of his parents. They had both died young, Ben said. He had no early remembrances except of the woman Karse had taken him away from, and this was so hazy and indistinct that he could not be sure how much of it was personal memory, and how much he had gathered from Ben. While he lived his dreamy out-door life at Flairs, he had been content to let the question rest. Since he had been with Mr. Brownlow he had asked Karse once or twice to tell him all he knew about himself ; but he had learned nothing except that he was probably better off than as if his parents had lived, " in respect of the learnin' he was gettin'."

Very soon after his removal to London, the Squire had written to ask him not to revisit Flairs for at least two years, and though Maurice had found this a very hard and tyrannical request, Ben had acquiesced in it so strongly, that he had been obliged to submit ; and his intercourse with his old friend had been confined to the rare letters received from him.

Now that all his manhood was roused by the sudden growth of Love—a growth which had given him the strange sensation of fuller powers, more matured judgment, of added years—he saw that he had been supine and indifferent in his want of curiosity. If he were Karse's cousin, who was Ben himself? He knew the warm regard in which the Squire held the old man, and the independent bearing of Ben towards him ; that might be his Border breeding, but still he was infinitely superior to others of his class, and had always prevented Maurice from associating with those who might have been thought fit companions for him. Maurice had frequently considered all this before, but the sort of moral earthquake his nature had just under-

gone, seemed to have displaced every idea, and now as he tried to restore order in his brain, a new light fell on its altered arrangements, shewing gaps and discrepancies hidden by long wear and obscurity.

He must see Ben before he could again face Roland Markham; but although the two years had expired, Mr. Dryden had written to his tutor forbidding his return to Flairs, till the fever had disappeared from Starby. He would write to Ben at once; and he sat down to the little table, the sole confidant of his literary efforts. But Ben was no hand at writing; besides, what would be necessary was a close cross-questioning, a personal influence which might by some agitating remembrance quicken and arouse hitherto unrevealed and forgotten circumstances.

No—he must go to Ben himself.

He longed to be at Flairs. There he could have walked out in the broad moonlight that lay gleaming on the roofs of the opposite houses, instead of being pent in with his throbbing head and feverish fancies. The sickness we most of us feel in early spring—the longing for green

trees and fair flowers, and the song of birds, stirred Maurice as it had so often before since he had given up his free life; and mingled with it now, came the longing to visit the scenes of his first meetings with Elinor.

Elinor—and as her bright image came fully before him, ways and means, and inquiries and misgivings were merged or rather hidden by the rays of light that encircled the glorious vision. In his passionate idolatry he could have knelt down and worshipped this; and forgetting all but her, he at length lay down in the hope that she might visit his dreams.

But he was disappointed: his imagination only refracted the more disturbing parts of the evening's meditations. He was in Elinor's home, struggling to free himself from the strong grasp of Roland Markham, while Elinor and the rest giped at him in contemptuous mockery of his efforts. Then came sudden darkness, and a pause rather of exhaustion than refreshing sleep.

He seemed to awake suddenly. Surely he was broad awake now, lying there in the moonlight.

He looked round him. He was no longer in his own room, and as memory tried to picture what had been his surroundings when he lay down to sleep, he knew that that faint mass of ideas had been dreams—this was reality. He was again a child, lying on the hard ground in front of the cabin beside the lake. The moon silvered half the expanse of the quivering water beside which he had so often played, and glimmered on the rugged outlines of the hills that shut it in on its further side; their base and the half of the lake that washed it was black in its intensity of shadow. The fearful terror of darkness—that sharp agony of vivid imagination—fixed Maurice's gaze in breathless horror on the shapeless, inky mass beyond the restless silver ripple. He had never suffered from this fear since his early years; now with the feeling of childhood it returned.

He lay intently watching—it seemed to him that the darkness was no longer uniform; in parts greyer shadows were visible amid the blackness; they moved backwards and forwards along the edge of the water. His strained sight

almost failed him, and he dared not relax its intensity ; he knew that within that shadow lay the secret either of his past or future life. But the silver ripples suddenly dulled, then faded away into a grey shadowy mass as a huge black cloud swept over the moonlight. The still calm was disturbed by the rising fury of the wind which came howling and shrieking through the clefts in the now almost invisible hills. One after another the scattered heavy rain-drops of approaching storm fell on Maurice's face ; yet he lay still, always watching for what was coming to him from the other side of the lake.

It came, but not with any startling suddenness or dreadful terror. Two figures--one erect and stately, the other bent and broken--passed him slowly, as they gradually separated themselves from the depth of shadow. The first went on firmly without turning its head ; the other bent over him and seemed trying to clasp him in its arms, but unable to do so. Maurice's terror felt suddenly unloosed, and he sprang to his feet, but the figure passed on behind the cottage ; the other was already out of sight.

He knew that these were his parents, and he rushed after them, feeling sure that they had come to resolve his doubts about himself. As he reached the angle of the cabin, behind which the last form had disappeared, another figure glided up from the lake, and in an instant stood between him and his pursuit. As he started up, the mass of vapour whirled by the wind, had again let the moon shine out, and Maurice saw that it was Cecil Brownlow. He tried to push past her, but he became conscious of being surrounded—other forms had followed Cecil closely, and now grouped beside her. He looked eagerly among them for the two first, but he could not identify any of these with them.

As he stood looking, they faded away, all but three—Cecil and Ben, and another, whom his heart knew before the moonlight fell on her face, for it was Elinor. At the sight of her his childhood vanished—he was a man, even more passionately more ardently loving than he had thought himself; he took her hand, but when he tried to draw her close beside him he found that it was Cecil's that he had clasped so

warmly. The moon was again overcast, and but for the difference in height of the two figures, he might have mistaken them. Before he could release Cecil's hand it was taken from him, and Elinor came forward, drawn it seemed to him by her uncle. He sprang forward to meet her, when a shock threw him backwards—the earth trembled under his feet, and a chasm yawned between himself and Elinor. His body swayed, and his mind seemed to rock in the dread of losing her. Gathering up his strength he tried to leap the gulf that parted them, but it was beyond his power to reach the farther side. Down—down he sank into utter darkness, fast becoming insensible. Suddenly he felt his wrist grasped and his whole body drawn slowly but irresistibly upwards, to the light. Mr. Dryden had rescued him, but his face had the stern, unforgiving look Maurice so well remembered.

He awoke—the pressure on his wrist was no imagination. His tutor was trying vainly to rouse him, and the sunshine told him how far he had slept into the morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. MARKHAM PAYS AN EARLY VISIT.

ROLAND MARKHAM passed nearly as disturbed a night as Maurice did, with no sweet love visions to soothe the anger that possessed all his faculties—he was angry with every one, with Elinor for receiving visitors without consulting him first, with Adelaide for appropriating James Fisher's society, with James himself for letting a mere boy come between him and Elinor, and with his wife for neglecting the due superintendence of her daughters.

Poor Mrs. Markham was thoroughly alarmed at this charge brought against her, for he had

roughly bade the girls be off to bed without good-nighting or nonsense, and she asked him what could have happened to vex him.

"Vex? Good Heavens, Elinor, you're enough to provoke a saint. Vex me? enough to provoke any man to fury to come up into his own drawing-room and find a young fellow he knows nothing of, hanging about his daughters—confound his coolness; anybody but me would have kicked him out of the house, I believe."

"But Roland, dear, it isn't likely we should know all the people Elinor does, and she said he was a friend of hers."

He muttered something he was possibly ashamed to say louder, and then told her she ought to be ashamed of herself to leave Elinor to her own devices in the way she did. "Mind you, Nell, you look surprised, and I dare say you are, it's the first time I've troubled myself to meddle in any fid-fad of etiquette, but I'll not have young men coming in at all hours they choose, and sitting alone with my girls. What's that about James Fisher? Yes, of course I don't object to him, he's a relation; besides, if

Elinor did take a fancy to him, she might do worse, but to see her languishing those eyes of hers at a boy, who can't give a reasonable account of himself—whom I shrewdly suspect to have no right to any name at all. It's the very—”

Poor Mrs. Markham was crying heartily—never a very difficult process with her when she was either frightened or annoyed.

He stopped, looked at her half savagely for an instant, and then seemed to change his mind.

“There, Nell, don't make a piece of work ; you know it always puts me out if you cry.”

She was quite as unhappy at his implied wish about Elinor and James Fisher, as at his rebuke. She had found out Addy's secret long ago, but several hints which had lately fallen from her husband had made her think it would be wise to keep her discovery to herself, while Elinor remained with them.

His next words made this impossible, for although Mrs. Markham had been persuaded to

deceive her parents, she was always frank and open with her husband.

"There's another thing, too, I'm vexed about; it seems to me that Fisher cares as much for Addy at times as he does for Elinor. Adelaide's just the sort of simpleton to fancy a man in love with her, when he's nothing of the kind. *I've* known girls of the sort, I can tell you, so I should be glad if you'd drop a hint about it's not being right to interfere between a sister and her lover. Make Addy believe it's selfish, or something of that, and she'll give it up at once. Now, Nell, there's no use in your looking miserable, and turning up your eyes as if I was hard on the girl, but you'll never persuade me a man with eyes in his head like Fisher, would neglect such a girl as Elinor for good, little, ordinary Addy, unless she sought him."

Mrs. Markham was trying to summon as much dignity as she could into her pretty insipid face.

"You are angry, Roland, and that makes you unjust; till Elinor came you never found fault with Adelaide as you do now. I don't

think it's fair,"—and the wounded motherly feelings swam out of her eyes again, and fell over her cheeks,—“to be always drawing comparisons and making contrasts between the girls; but if it is to be done, then I must tell you, Roland, that although you are so clever, you are mistaken if you think Elinor would make James as good a wife as Addy would, or—” and the secret burst out in a small feminine triumph, “that he cares nearly as much for her as he does for her dear, good, little sister.”

Having delivered herself of this speech, and considering what Roland Markham's anger could be, it was a decidedly courageous achievement, Mrs. Markham retreated up-stairs, leaving her husband to digest his wrath before he followed her.

But this was impossible. His wife's words, and his own observations during the last few days had made it difficult not to believe them, showed him that all his schemes might be overthrown by the very person whom he counted on to aid in their execution. Adelaide, how dared she come tangling the strands of his web? and

what a fool James must be to prefer her to so glorious a creature as her sister. He paced up and down before the fire. No, James Fisher was not a fool; surely he must understand him when he had known him, and managed him too, ever since he was breeched. If things had not gone too far with Adelaide—stuff, what was the use of an “if?” girls’ hearts didn’t break now-a-days—a little change of scene and a new lover would be a capital cure. Well, Adelaide disposed of, he had but to hint to James Elinor’s prospects with regard to Flairs, to make him as eager for the match as he was himself. The only possible drawback was Elinor herself; was it likely that any engagement known to Mr. Dryden, but to be kept secret from others, existed between her and that dark-eyed, handsome youngster?—and here Mr. Markham fell into a deep reverie; when he roused from it, his anger was fiercer than ever; it was, perhaps, well for his wife that she had fallen sound asleep before he joined her.

Mr. Markham got up much earlier than usual, and had left the house before either his wife or

Elinor appeared. To Adelaide, who made his breakfast for him, he spoke more kindly than he had done since Elinor's arrival among them—that is to say he was less rude. There was no positive hardness or brutality in this man's nature; he had simply no sensitiveness himself, and did not believe in the existence of delicate feelings in others; "that sort of thing," he said, "was all sentiment and bosh." So that when his senses were annoyed by the contrast the demeanour of the two sisters offered, his impulsiveness vented itself in daily requests to his younger daughter—not to come into the room like a crab, not to look as if she were going to be hung if a stranger spoke to her, and above all, when she shook hands to look people in the face; which requests, and many others doubtless improving to Adelaide had they been judiciously administered, yet being delivered aloud before the younger children, servants, or even chance visitors, somehow seemed to have a contrary effect, and rather crushed out of the timid girl the little self-respect she possessed. But this morning, although she had a frightened remem-

brance of her father's anger on the previous evening, she was not called on to endure the sharp suffering, inadvertence of this kind can inflict—suffering as keen as the lash itself; and while the flayed victim moves about by stealth, robbed of all the grace a free independent bearing gives to almost any young woman, the inflicter lolls back in his or her chair, serenely unconscious of the mischief done—a mischief which frequently is life-long.

On the contrary, her father praised the coffee, praised her early rising, and even said just before he went away, that he wished Elinor would take pattern by “such a good, little girl.”

Adelaide was very happy, at least till her morbidity plunged her into a tangled endeavour to discover how much of this enjoyment was pure, and how much alloyed by the secret pleasure of discovering that there was one point on which her father thought her superior to Elinor. Poor child, she was in the right way, but as yet she sorely hindered herself, by her want of trust in other help than her own.

Roland Markham walked along briskly; he

felt pleased with himself this morning, as a lazy man does who finds he is stirring two hours earlier than usual. Adelaide's smiling face too, had made him feel happier; it seemed a foretaste of the ease with which a little management and petting would reconcile her to the trial she would now be called on to bear.

But he turned his thoughts restlessly away: girls always had half-a-dozen love affairs before they made up their minds; it was mere folly, womanish nonsense in him to think so much about it. Still he grew more and more disquieted and irritable as he approached Mr. Fisher's chambers. Adelaide's eyes were too much like her mother's for him to find any difficulty in reading their expression, and he had seen her look at James, lately, with a devotion that was quite unmistakable.

This had not greatly troubled him, till his wife's hint as to Mr. Fisher's own attachment came to show him how easily all his plans might be irrevocably overturned.

He stood hesitating a few minutes, when he reached the second floor, occupied by his cousin.

As a rule, James was easily persuaded—especially by Mr. Markham—hence the advantage of his marrying Elinor; but he was just the sort of man to resent interference about anything he had set his mind on, in a quiet, obstinate way, that might entirely defeat Roland's present plans.

He must not be precipitate; he must go to work covertly, so as to throw Fisher off his guard.

James sat yawning over a luxurious breakfast, in a handsome silk dressing-gown and needle-work slippers, the offering of one of his numerous admirers. A French novel was carelessly slipped under some severe looking law book, as his cousin came in.

"You Roland! why, what can have happened to start you from your sleep before the day's aired?"

"The truth is"—Markham spoke with that wonderful hearty frankness which often carries an air of sincerity along with it—"I couldn't sleep; I was so bothered with what happened last night."

“Happened last night?” Mr. Fisher yawned again, as if uncertain whether his memory was quite awake yet, and looked up in Roland’s face.

“Why, I mean that young fellow coming and thrusting himself into my house, without invitation, or leave of mine or anybody else’s.”

“Are you quite sure he’d not been invited by any one?” His cousin noticed the repressed eagerness in Fisher’s tone, although he still affected the same lazy indifference.

“Not likely. He’s a *protégé* of Wentworth Dryden’s, it seems; and, I suppose, finding out that Elinor was in town, he thought it a good opportunity of ingratiating himself with the heiress of Flairs,—a most monstrous liberty, in my opinion.”

“What does your daughter think?”

Roland Markham grew confused, in spite of his profound diplomacy.

“Who do you mean—Elinor? Of course she’s kind hearted, and was civil to the boy, whom I believe she knew something of when he was much younger. But Elinor’s a bit of an aristocrat, let me tell you. She don’t like

that levelling style of manner any better than I do."

"You, Roland, why I always consider you a thorough radical!"

Markham grew more and more nettled.

He was losing his time in arguments wholly irrelevant, and had a dim idea besides, that his pliable cousin was turning it to his own purposes.

He felt that he had better consider a little before he answered; and while he hesitated, Fisher went on:—

"It struck me that Elinor—Miss Dryden, I mean—was on very friendly terms with this Mr. Karse; in fact, I fancied they quite understood one another."

It seemed as if Fisher intended to throw his cousin off his balance this morning. If he had not that intention, his chance hits were very successful. Mr. Markham reddened, and then turned pale with passion, almost as furious with Fisher's daring, as at the danger he suggested. He tried to laugh, and succeeded as well as men of his uncontrolled temperament do, when they think to hide their real feelings.

“You’re joking, of course, James? It’s lucky Elinor don’t hear you. Why, she’d as much think of engaging herself to a raw boy like that as—well—as you would think of attaching yourself to Mary or Adelaide; one idea would be as preposterous as the other. No; I should like Nell to marry young, but a girl who is heiress of so much wealth must not throw herself away on a nobody like young Karse. Ha, ha, the joke’s rather too broad, James!”

Mr. Fisher looked not quite pleased to be laughed at, but he did not refuse to father the joke so positively thrust on him. He seemed to wish the subject changed.

“I thought you told me once that the Squire had not executed any deed or will, appointing your daughter his heiress?”

“No, I didn’t say that—I couldn’t have said it. What I did say was, he had never confided such a settlement to me, as I consider he should in common courtesy have done. Of course, his whole conduct towards the girl betrays his intentions plainly. Why, I believe, but for this fever, he’d never have suffered her to remain

a night under my roof—the old scoundrel!” —his face darkened, as it always did, when this topic was mooted. “I believe he wants her to care for no one in the world except himself. I believe he wanted to coop her up at Flairs until he’d got her safely married to some titled simpleton, who’d neglect her, and break her heart, and run through the property. Of course, Elinor’s good enough for a lord—I know that; but I have my own ideas about her future; and I think that suspicious old fool may find himself outwitted for once.”

He did not look at Fisher during this rather long speech; he was so bent on balancing an ivory paper-cutter on his forefinger, and then letting it tap the same measured number on the table, that perhaps he did not see that Mr. Fisher had risen, and walked to the fireplace, so that he no longer faced him. If Markham had turned his head suddenly, he would have seen first a look of wretched disquiet, and then an eager, intense interest in his cousin’s face.

He was self-conscious, for he passed his hand across his eyes when he spoke.

"Do you mean, then, that you think she has settled it for herself already?"

"Confound it, no!" He only looked up for an instant, and then turned to the paper-cutter again—his words coming out with the dry sound that indicates we are saying what we mean our hearer to construe by our own mental foot-notes, but which we ostensibly intend to bear a different interpretation. If the hearer's acuteness spells out the foot-notes, well and good; but he must not suppose they exist, except in his imagination. "She's only twenty, and besides a few French fools and German gluttons, I don't think she's had much in the way of male society. I suppose she saw some English in her travels, but they seem never to have stayed long enough in any place to make a lasting acquaintance."

"Just so. What do you mean by what you said just now, then?"

The words were inquisitive, but their sound expressed the most lazy indifference.

Something in them, however, made Mr. Markham turn round and face his cousin.

Fisher's eyes drooped beneath his, and a satisfied smile came into Roland's lips. His smile was usually of that physical kind which seldom reaches the eyes.

"I mean this," he had resumed his former attitude. "I think it quite likely before Nell returns to Flairs at all, that some Londoner may be struck by her, and may succeed in winning her affections, for although she's the most heart-whole girl of twenty I ever came across, she's just the sort to be generous, spite of her expectations, in promising herself to a man who loved her for herself—but mind you, she'd want a man's whole heart; no half-devotedness would do for her. What lots of it she'll get when once she mixes with the world; a glorious creature like that isn't seen every day."

No answer came, and Mr. Markham looked at his watch, found out that he should be late at his office—he had better be moving, so he departed, going down the stairs in a more self-satisfied frame of mind than he had gone up them.

It would have been more natural as well as

easier, to so coarse-minded a man, if he had openly told Fisher he wished him to marry his daughter Elinor, but there was nothing simple in Roland Markham ; it was from him that Elinor inherited her innate love of intrigue—he always preferred a crooked path to a straight one ; he imagined that if he seemed anxious for such a marriage his cousin might suspect its desirability, and on the other hand, if he positively forbade an attachment between Fisher and Adelaide, mere opposition might deepen that which already existed. Altogether he felt satisfied ; his conscience no longer pricked him about his youngest daughter. If James now transferred his affections, it would be plain that Adelaide's was not a nature capable of retaining them, and the same kind of thing might have happened after marriage, and made her wretched for life ; he had said nothing definite one way or another to bias his cousin, the onus must rest entirely with himself.

CHAPTER IX.

BEN.

THE winter seemed to have awakened, or at any rate, had resolved to assert its power before Spring came to send it into its usual banishment. Very late in the day, though, the mornings had grown long and bright, the leaf-buds were swelling, crocuses of all hues made the flower-garden at Flairs like a brilliant piece of enamel, before the frost came. It was plain he had come at last in earnest, as terrible in his fierceness as if he had been caged up in the Polar regions, and had just broken loose.

Very bitter and hard to bear by frames un-

strung by their usual winter seasoning—but fraught with hope, because of its very severity, to the fever-stricken village.

Maurice had left London by an early train, and he was now walking fast along the ice-bound road, leading from the station to Flairs. He had not spoken of his journey to Mr. Brownlow—he meant to return the same evening, so that there was really no risk, as he should not go near Starby; but he knew his tutor would have opposed his wish to see Ben, and he could not sleep again till this night-mare of doubt was removed.

His brain was still excited, and his whole body fevered by his last night's vision; the bitter cold was refreshing, although it pierced through all his wraps and numbed his fingers as he tried to open the little side gate near Sir Stuart's park.

He pushed through it, and found himself once more at Flairs. It bore no welcoming face, there was a hard, grey look on sky and earth—a mourning for the long banishment into which the sunshine had departed. The north wind

drove steadily into Maurice's face, as if to turn him back, and at intervals a few unwilling snow-flakes fell, seemingly afraid of the bitter atmosphere.

A chill feeling crept over him ; Nature was echoing the warning of his heart, that his quest would be fruitless.

The little gate in the enclosure brought the warmth back ; he should see Ben in five minutes now—his dear, old, foster father : he almost forgot the object of his journey as the home-like feelings of affection asserted themselves.

He walked gently over the dry twigs near the cottage-door—he wanted to give the dear fellow a surprise. He raised the latch, and went softly in. The old woman sate nodding over the fire just where Mr. Dryden had left her on the previous day ; he had not returned since, for the exertion and fatigue had completely overpowered him, but a younger woman had been sent to supply his place, one whose husband had been taken from her in the early days of the fever.

Before Maurice could get any coherent answer

from the sleeper, the nurse hearing a strange footstep came quickly from the sick-room.

A great fear came upon Maurice—then he guessed all, and, passing the woman, was springing up-stairs when she pulled him back and obliged him to listen to her.

She told him of Mr. Karse's recent danger and of the precarious state in which he still continued ; she could not say how much harm might not be done by a sudden shock. Maurice hesitated—if she had talked of the danger of infection to himself he would have broken away from her hold—now he stood still, thinking.

“ You say he is quite awake and sensible ; well, then, tell him Maurice is coming up-stairs to see him—it will do him good instead of harm ; and be quick,” he saw the woman's look of reluctance, “ or I shall be there before you have told him.”

Ben looked so ghastly—his wan face discoloured by the purple rings below his eyes and round his mouth, that the youth shuddered as he stood at the bed foot, gazing at him.

The next moment he had clasped the meagre

hand held out to him, and covered it with kisses. The woman went quietly out of the room, holding up her hand by way of caution to Maurice.

"Why didn't they tell me?" he almost gasped, for the agony of grief which yet he felt he must suppress, was choking him; "oh, dear, dear Ben, I never knew you were ill."

He pressed the hand he held over his eyes to hide them, but Ben felt the hot tears which had sprung there.

"My puir lad," he said, faintly, "it's a blessing to look on your bonny face, but Maurice, ye daurna bide here, it's the fever, and maybe just the look on me's done ye harm already."

"I'll not leave you again," said Maurice, firmly; "do you think, after all you've done for me, I'll leave you to strangers, Ben? don't ask it."

He rose from his knees, and seated himself deliberately beside the bed, as if determined to carry out his resolution.

The sick man turned his face feebly round towards him.

"I'm not left to strangers, Maurice—the

Squire's tended me all through more like a woman than a man ;—I've known it, for all the straying of my wits. He only left me yesterday—bless him, he'll soon be back again."

He spoke very slowly, pausing for breath to return between every sentence, but his voice was firm and distinct.

The last words roused Maurice, and recalled the purpose of his visit, but how could he distress and disturb Ben, now ; and yet he felt some uneasiness at the thought of meeting Mr. Dryden. He had not seen him since he left Flairs. The few letters he had received had been kind, very grave, and formal : it was a strange revulsion, but Maurice felt keenly as he sat still, awaiting his benefactor's arrival, that Mr. Dryden's active dislike had inspired more affection than the benefits so coldly conferred—a little more personal interest would have lightened the obligation that weighed more and more heavily, and which he could not make up his mind to shake off.

"I could have taken anything from him, once," he said to himself ; "there is no pain in

the favours of those we love, but the Squire won't even let me give him thanks or affection—it makes the debt too heavy; he does not treat me like a free man: but for what I owe him, I would tell him he is a tyrant, for I don't suppose he knows it.”

He had sate musing quite forgetful of Ben, quite unconscious that the sunken but intelligent eyes were watching every change of mood. He started as Ben spoke again.

“Ye've no lost yer auld gaits, I see,” he said, smiling; “ye're just gane daft a wee; eh, Maurice; I thought ye'd have thought a heap about the Squire's care and guidness to your auld friend.”

Maurice roused up with a desperate struggle at attention and concentration of thought, in which he found it hard to conquer.

“Oh, yes—yes, I heard all you said, dear Ben, and I thought it very kind; in fact, it shows more heart than I gave the Squire credit for.”

A sudden light shone out of Karse's eyes, and a flush came into his face.

"Shame on ye, then, lad! ye're the last I ever thought to hear say a word against him—him that has done for you all that your heart most wished for. Oh, Maurice!" he went on, his agitation giving him strength so that he turned his head completely round on the pillow. "Have ye deceived me all these years?—have ye a black spot like that in yer heart, and I not knowing of it?"

"Hush, Ben!" spite of the excitement he felt, he knew Karse must be calmed; "I'm not ungrateful; and, besides, I didn't come here to complain of Mr. Dryden. Now I sha'n't tell you any more"—he smiled, and the sweet look soothed more than his words—"unless you keep silence, or when the Squire comes he'll say I've done you harm instead of good. I mean, that he always seems so cold, so anxious to check affection, that I wonder at his showing it even to you; only, dear Ben"—he took up the wasted hand and kissed it tenderly—"I suppose no one could help loving you. Perhaps," he went on, anxious to divert the invalid's thoughts from what he felt must produce dis-

cussion, "I'm jealous of the Squire's nursing ; it seems as if no one but I had a right to take care of you, Ben, who've been father and mother both to me."

He had not meant to say this ; he knew directly he saw Karse's state that to venture near the subject of his dream would be to put himself in the way of temptation, but the words seemed to escape from his lips without his will, and to bring back with them each figure of the dream with vivid reality, followed by all the painful uncertainties he had been trying to forget. If he spoke another word he should break all his resolutions.

Ben looked searchingly at him ; he lay back now exhausted ; the temporary excitement had left him paler than ever. He whispered to Maurice, and pointed to a medicine bottle on the table.

This revived him, but still he lay silent, deep in thought, for his brows contracted, and his mouth closed, as if with the effort of rousing memory.

"Father and mother," he said at last, open-

ing his eyes and keeping them fixed on Maurice, "puir bairn, it's hard on ye not to have known them, to have been robbed all yer life of the sweetest part of it. Will ye know them when ye meet them in Heaven, or will ye pass them by, and cling to me there?"

The look of pain, of almost anguish, that wrung all natural expression out of the youth's face made Karse's lips quiver; he thought it had reference to himself.

"Ye think I'm passing there, lad; I hope so"—he spoke very reverently; "but we can only hope, my bairn; at least, such as I am dare not do more. I'd have liked a few words with the rector and his prayers, but His will be done—if I need them I shall have them. He knows what we want and what we've no need of. He is all our help."

He paused, and Maurice was too deeply affected to undeceive him at once, for he had not dreamed that Ben would not recover.

"There's been often something on my mind to say," Ben went on, more as if communing with himself than heeding a listener, "and I've

always meant to leave it till the last. Is it the last now?" he said. Maurice dared not speak, there was an awe in Ben's manner that impressed on him the belief that he had been too sanguine, and that his only friend would not recover. "I've kept it back, lad, I don't know why; sometimes it seemed like telling the Squire's secret, but it may be he thinks you know it all the while. It's come to my mind he must, since he's done so much for ye."

Maurice's eager interest showed itself in his eyes, though he strove hard to keep it back.

"You're exhausting yourself, Ben; you will tell me some other time."

Ben looked at him to enjoin silence—he went on—

"There are no some other times left for me, lad. When the Squire sent me to fetch you—ah, ye never knowed that before"—Maurice had started up with surprise—"he thought the woman that nursed ye would be dead betime I reached ye, but she weren't quite. She said to me when I told her what I'd come for, 'I hope the Squire 'll be kind to a poor child that's kin

to him, now he's neither father nor mother left to care for him.' When it came near the end with her I said—'You're sure he's neither father nor mother?'—and she answered—'No father, and his mother dead; he's kin to him as sends ye.'"

Maurice tried to speak, but Ben's look checked him. He lay still some time trying to gain strength for what more had to be told. His voice was very feeble when he spoke again.

"Are ye listening, lad?—All the Squire said to me was, 'Ben, I wish the child well fed and cared for, as ye would bring up a boy of your own. Keep him away from me; he's the son of one who did me deadly injury, and the look of him 'ud bring it all back.'"

The last effort had exhausted Ben; the deathly whiteness that spread slowly over his face, the drooping eyelids, and relaxation of the lower jaw, seemed to Maurice tokens that all was over. He ran to the door and called for the nurse.

She was frightened, but not so much as he had been. She told him he must leave Mr.

Karse to her ; that if, when he recovered consciousness, he saw him, it might bring back the emotion that had caused this faintness, " For I don't think, sir," the woman said reproachfully, " that you've minded all I've said to you."

He left the room and went down-stairs in silence. He felt so utterly confused, so thrown off his balance by all he had just heard, by remorse at having, in his eager interest, suffered his dear old friend to exhaust his newly-found strength, that he had neither sight nor hearing. He sank down quietly on one of the wooden settles by the fire, never heeding the sound of approaching footsteps.

Nor did he notice that the old woman, wakeful enough now, rose to her feet, and after listening a moment, raised the latch of the door and went outside the cottage. There was a murmur of voices, but Maurice noticed nothing. Stupefied with the impossibility of realising all he had just been listening to, he sate quite still, leaning his head against the angle of the projecting chimney.

The old woman came bustling in, but he scarcely roused even when she spoke.

“That’s the gentleman, Squire.”

Then Maurice became conscious before he saw distinctly, that a tall man was standing in the entrance just behind the woman.

He glanced up, and recognised Mr. Dryden.

The Squire looked very grave, and there was more agitation in his manner than Maurice had ever seen before.

“How came you here?”

“I wanted to see Ben; I did not know he was ill, or I should have come before.”

An angry flush rose to Mr. Dryden’s forehead.

“Has not Mr. Brownlow told you that I wished—that I desired”—he said the last word sternly, for there was a proud look of resistance in the young man’s face he had never seen before—“you would never leave London so long as the fever lasted?”

“Mr. Dryden, not even the respect I owe you ought to make me neglect Ben; no one has so great a right to care for him: he is the only father I have ever known.”

He looked proudly up in the Squire's face ; it seemed to him then—spite of his obligations—he could never love the man who had, he now knew, hated him for his dead father's sake, and to his surprise, his undaunted bearing had its effect.

Mr. Dryden's lip quivered, his eyes drooped before Maurice's steady gaze ; he stood still a few minutes in thought before he answered, even then he did not look up.

"It is natural and right you should love him, but you can do him no good by staying here ; on the contrary, you will give him a fresh anxiety. If you really love him, Maurice, as I believe you do," he looked at him now almost beseechingly, "you will go away at once, and run no further risk. I will write to tell you every day how he progresses ; surely that will content you ?"

But Maurice stood still.

"You're very kind, sir, but why should I care so much for life as to neglect a plain duty, just to save it ? and it's an even chance if I take the fever after all."

"And if you do take it," Mr. Dryden spoke with a strange eagerness, "you forget that you bring a fresh patient where we have already too many to attend to, now that our nurses are sickening."

His impatient tone stirred Maurice's rebellious feeling; but the last words touched him—they were so sadly spoken.

He remembered all he had heard of the Squire's noble self-devotion, he saw how worn and tired he looked, and he felt ashamed of his hard feelings towards him.

"But I could help you, sir, if I stayed; you look sadly fagged; do let me stay and help you?" He spoke with the singular frank smile that Miss Brownlow had pronounced quite irresistible, looking straight into the Squire's eyes, and again Mr. Dryden bent his head, this time in visible agitation, and it seemed to Maurice that tears were in his eyes, as he answered.

"You can help me best now, Maurice, if you have any real regard for me, by going at once back to London, and relieving me of all anxiety for your safety—not all," he forced himself to

smile as if to take any reproach out of his words, "till I hear that you are safe and well, this rash journey of yours must give me some fear for its result."

He held out his hand. Strive against it as he would, the irresistible influence he had struggled with in his boyhood—an influence which had at times subdued even the self-will of Elinor—conquered Maurice now.

He felt that the Squire had at last discovered the way to control him, and that there was a genuine tone of interest in his anxiety to send him away; he let him lead him outside the cottage.

"You will let me know how dear Ben is?" he said.

"I will. Write to me as soon as you reach town; you shall hear to-morrow evening about Karse. Now, good-bye."

CHAPTER X.

LOVE'S DAWN.

AND while Maurice's sudden passion for Elinor had mastered him, so that his ardent desire to create a future for her, had awakened determination to solve all doubts about himself, Cecil Brownlow stayed quietly with her invalid aunt near Oxford.

The life was very dull—Miss Brownlow's health prevented her from receiving visitors, and with the exception of a little occasional shopping, Cecil had no interruption to the musings of her solitary walks. In vain she tried not to muse, to rouse herself by outward sights and sounds,

to notice the change that almost each day brought in the hedges, to listen to the increasing chirping of the birds, and the music of their morning and evening songs, to stop and inhale that indescribable perfume—the incense that heralds spring; she did all these things, but they were not spontaneous, she seemed forced to them as an escape from her own thoughts. She did not dare to ask herself boldly why she lived in this unusual disquiet, so unlike the pure self-communings of her former life. If she had been compelled to give a reason, she would possibly have said frankly, that she was alarmed at the hold the memory of Maurice Karse possessed over her, but to herself she was severe to sternness. She felt and knew — as women only can know — although to themselves even they will deny the consciousness—that if she were to allow herself to discuss the right or wrong of thinking of him, the mischief would grow; it was only by forcing her thoughts away that she could hope for peace.

On the first day of her arrival, as she sat

waiting for her aunt's appearance, there had come a sudden recollection of his looks and manner on the previous evening, and she wondered if he would miss her. And then came the remembrance of her Aunt Jane Ann's laughing warning on her first arrival, not to let Maurice Karse fall in love with her. Cecil's cheeks grew hot as she remembered disgraceful stories she had heard of girls who had loved men in a lower rank of life than their own, and how she had always considered that such things could not happen if the woman maintained her own self-respect, and the next minute she smiled at her vanity. Why need she fear that Maurice's peace would be disturbed by her absence; they would miss each other as two people brought up without companions must miss such unusual society, but that would be all—and then her aunt's entrance had ended her reflections.

Was it only the remembrance of the disquiet those reflections had caused that made her undergo such constant strife to avoid their recurrence? If Cecil had been told she loved Maurice Karse,

she would have denied it, but with some women—especially those whose imaginative gifts are stronger than their opinion of their own attractions—there is a stage of feeling, the precursor of the love which lies with folded wings deep in their hearts, hidden from their own knowledge, but ready to soar forth in answer to love. Such women will never give their affections unasked, but when they do give them, they give all ; they venture all their wealth on the one cast. They do not love from gratified vanity or admiration, or any of the motives that influence others ; their fervid imaginations long ago—perhaps in childhood—created to themselves an ideal to be worshipped, an image to them of the Good and Beautiful—which they but too often pass their lives in vain search after ; hence their utter indifference to those who love them, but who fail to realise their imaginings, and hence their misery if tempted to wed against their own convictions.

Cecil had been a dreamer from childhood, and from her mother's ill-health had been left too much to herself. As she grew older, she struggled against the romantic dreams of earlier

days, for she felt their enervating influence on her daily life.

But now, though she tried not to think of Maurice, there were looks and words which would come back—looks that had spoken glowing, unfeigned admiration ; and then she turned from such remembrance troubled at her own vanity. His words were harder to banish, and besides these, ideas shared in common, which it was impossible now to dissociate from him, would recur with an obstinacy that puzzled her.

Every former resource had become distasteful or else proved a snare to bring him to her mind. If she read she found herself wondering what he would think of such and such a passage ; and even the outward distraction she sought in her rambles would often lead her insensibly to recall his glowing descriptions of Nature.

If she had been still unconscious she would have cherished these thoughts and have found the monotonous life at Kintry a dreamland of happiness ; but the perpetual struggle with herself was wearing and depressing.

Cecil began to think time passed more slowly at Kintry than anywhere else.

A sentence in her Uncle Erasmus's letter to Aunt Mary, disturbed her strangely, and yet she could have given herself no satisfactory reason for such disquiet. "Tell Cecil," he wrote, "that Maurice and I met her charming friend, Miss Dryden, yesterday, and to my surprise they greeted one another as old friends. I believe my pupil is to spend an evening at Mr. Markham's house."

What could Elinor want with Maurice, after the slighting manner in which she had spoken of him? Cecil decided that first impressions were always the true ones, and that she was quite sure she did not like Elinor Dryden, spite of her charming manner and amusing talk.

Even her selfish, complaining aunt noticed the change in her spirits; but with the usual dislike of a confirmed invalid for the ailments of others, she decided that Cecil was getting over-anxious about her father, and that her pale face and heavy eyes were caused by fretting. She was partly right—for the long separation was

becoming very trying to the loving daughter, and at times it seemed as if she must rebel, and set off for Starby at once; but the dread of weakening her father's hands and overtaking his strength by adding to his anxieties, restrained her, and so the days passed wearily on in the perpetual mental conflict, or rather flight from it, which was growing too hard to sustain.

Cecil found herself constantly longing for post-time—the only excitement of the day. Her father's letters had been lately shorter and less hopeful. He seemed anxious about Mr. Dryden, too. In the letter that met her on her arrival at Kintry, he said there had been a plan of bringing both her and Elinor Dryden to Flairs; but the imprudence of Northover, Mr. Dryden's housekeeper, had defeated this, so they must be content with patience for a while—a patience which so far as her meeting with Elinor went, Cecil felt would not be taxed by waiting.

Elinor had received the same news, only more detailed. Her uncle had related Northover's folly in risking the danger of infection to the whole household merely to gratify her own curi-

osity. He told Elinor how much he regretted having permitted the housekeeper to return to Flairs ; but, since this had been done, it was necessary now to wait and see the result of her imprudence. If in a week's time she showed no feverish symptoms, Elinor was at liberty to return.

Elinor was in no hurry. Home was no longer so dull as it had seemed at first, and she shrank from the prospect of being shut up at Flairs with a "silly prudish girl like Cecil Brownlow," without even the enlivenment of her uncle's presence.

She had been strangely fascinated by Maurice. Sometimes it was impossible to believe him the rough, wayward, country lad who had saved her life, and whom she had tried to benefit ; and at other times when she recalled his ways and looks they seemed to bring back freshly the irresistible attraction she had always felt towards him.

She was surprised and almost annoyed to find how much she resented James Fisher's desertion. He was inferior to Maurice both in mind and person ; but he had mixed more with the world. Maurice's admiration was gratifying enough, but

he had none of the soft-voiced, insidious flattery of her cousin. Something that seemed apart from herself warned Elinor that she could never do wrong in James's eye, but that the slightest falsehood or deceit would be judged hardly by Maurice Karse; and yet, although this conviction might have taught her how much higher was his claim on her respect and esteem, she felt that his thorough ignorance of society, of women and their ways, took all value from his praise, but that the good opinion of her cousin was a thing to be coveted and not lightly thrown away. She did not want to make Adelaide unhappy; still it did not appear that there was an authorised engagement between them, and if he had merely returned to his former allegiance from remorse at Adelaide's evident sorrow, he could not be permanently attached to her.

But these meditations were not the cause of Elinor's present perplexity.

She sat in the study—a small dingy room behind the dining-parlour, looking out on the backs of the houses, with a foreground of leads on which a protuberance glazed at top

suggested the notion of an imprisoned Cyclops, who did the kitchen work.

Adelaide was hearing Mary's lessons, while Elinor sat before a desk strewn with bills and scraps of paper on which she had been vainly trying to add up the sum total.

Her brows were knit—her eyes contracted; presently she pushed her chair vehemently away from the table.

"I was never meant for this counting-house drudgery," she said, forcing a laugh. "You're quick at accounts, Addy; do add these things up and see what they come to. I'll take Mary's lesson."

Mary tossed her head. She had no belief in Elinor's teaching powers, though she thought her grand and clever. Elinor had no patience with the imperfect lesson, and when Adelaide looked up from her task, she saw the younger sister crying, and the eldest flushed and angry.

"Oh, Addy, Nell's so cross," sobbed Mary.

"Adelaide, be so kind as to send that child up-stairs—her impertinence is intolerable."

But Mary did not wait to be told. She

floanced out of the room, turning round as soon as her hand was on the lock of the door, to tell Elinor that she'd no business to be cross with her lessons when she couldn't even do her own sums without Addy's help.

Elinor restrained her wrath till the child was out of hearing.

"Adelaide, how shamefully you are bringing up that little vixen ; such self-will and such an unrestrained temper are quite intolerable. Dignity in a woman is one thing, but rebellion against the opinion and control of elders is insupportable."

The flashing eyes and angry tone struck Adelaide forcibly, as a comment on Elinor's own words.

"You will find that quite right, I think," she said, pushing the long list across the table. Then she went on nervously—"You—you don't mean to say you owe all those things, Elinor ? Why there are among them all the presents you've given to us."

Elinor rose out of her chair, looking stately and surprised.

"I'm not angry with you, Addy, but you say very strange things sometimes. The price of a present is the affair only of the giver, and ready-money payment is a thing only thought of among the lower classes. You will know this when you come to have money of your own."

Adelaide shrank from her sister's words as if they had struck her in the face.

"Then, Elinor, I'm glad to belong to the lower class you speak of, for I could not bear to live in debt!"

She sighed, for she was beginning to understand the insolence of tradesmen and the half-whispered discussions so frequent between her father and mother; but then, the atmosphere of debt she lived in was caused by necessary expenses; it seemed to her that it was much worse for Elinor to run wilfully into it for trinkets and presents.

"In debt! Adelaide, my dear child, don't be an idiot," Elinor laughed, playfully, to show what an excellent humour she was in; "one would think I owed hundreds of pounds—and

don't you suppose that Uncle Dryden gives me all I want. I should have written to him to double my allowance weeks ago, only I don't want to worry him during the fever ; now, what are you looking so prim and solemn for—your face is a yard long :” and she drew her own mouth down in comical imitation.

Adelaide was coming across the room with a look full of eager entreaty, but Elinor's words jarred her, and made her change the tone of her answer. She was not angry, but the rebuff to her timid nature made her abrupt and constrained.

“Then I think you mustn't study him any longer ; a man has been here three times already, asking for Miss Dryden, and Jane always says you are not at home ; yesterday I was crossing the hall at the time, and I interrupted to say you were up-stairs, but Jane contradicted me so decidedly that I felt quite surprised to find you really were in the drawing-room.”

“And what business can it possibly be of yours ?”

Elinor's tone was so scornful, that Adelaide

literally trembled with the fear of offending her, though she felt it must be done.

"I did not think it was my business ; I thought it was some impostor, and I only wished Jane would get rid of him without telling stories, but I see now that he only came to be paid what is owing to him or his master. Oh ! Elinor ! if you can't get the money to pay him at once, let me take back my bracelet and mamma's brooch, and all the things you have given to papa—I'm sure they could not bear to be the means of your running in debt ; it seems so dreadful for a young person like you."

"Young person like me ! really, Addy, you are complimentary ;" she drew up her tall, graceful figure, and threw her head back—she looked very unlike an ordinary "young person," as she stood now facing poor, blushing Adelaide. With her eyes filled with tears, and her lips trembling, the younger sister appeared full of guilty shame, while Elinor's flashing eyes, and pale, self-controlled face might have passed for indignant innocence. "Listen to me," she went on in a hard, resolute voice that compelled atten-

tion ; “ by what right do you set yourself up as a judge over me ? I am answerable to no one but my Uncle Dryden, and if he is satisfied you must be so too ; do you know that if you were to carry out your mad project, you would denounce me as a swindler and a cheat, and destroy my character for life—will you never learn worldly wisdom, Adelaide ? ”

It was painful to watch the flickering colour that seemed as if it could not stay on the other girl's face—it literally trembled there ; at that instant every bit of Adelaide felt afraid of the words that sprung on her tongue, and would be uttered, spite of her efforts to stifle them.

“ I don't want ever to learn it ; I don't want to be one thing, and try to seem another. Stop, Elinor,” for her sister tried to sweep past her in the tempest of wrath excited by these words. “ I do not think you are a cheat and a swindler, but I think you deceive your own soul.”

“ Soul—Addy ! if you knew the uncontrollable disgust I have to saints and preaching-women you'd be quiet ; it is you who are self-deceived : you forget all about the Pharisee and the Pub-

lican; you've never been put in the way of temptation—you don't know what it is. After all, Mary Magdalene was fond of fine clothes and jewellery, and yet she found more favour than any."

Adelaide stood still, silent from surprise; she had meant to tell her sister that she considered herself as what she intended to be, rather than as what she was, but always so full of sensitive self-consciousness that the slightest rebuff, just or unjust, sent her into a morbid enquiry as to which of her failings had led her to merit it; she now at once acknowledged Elinor's reproach—she had been like the Pharisee—she had been judging one as hardened in self-love and extravagance, who repented so deeply as to liken herself to her who was chief among sinners.

With much of good in her, with little of guile, she was yet incapable of benefiting Elinor. Her deep, sisterly love, so singularly warm for a girl of eighteen, might have pleaded, and at length have won attention to her earnest humility and self-denial; but the jealousy and distrust which had arisen respecting her lover

had checked demonstrative affection between the sisters, at least for a time, and although Elinor was not sensitive, she was exacting, and she knew by the absence of small signs and tokens that Adelaide's love for her had changed.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. FISHER'S PERPLEXITY.

WHEN Roland Markham disturbed his cousin at breakfast, he disturbed a good deal more than its digestion.

If there were any special human enjoyment coveted by James Fisher—I say any special one, for he dearly loved all the soft resting-places and “honeysuckle arbours” on life’s journey—it was to be left in peace, not to be interfered with or worried, or to be shown that he ought to adopt any definite line of conduct, or that others had feelings which might be wounded to the quick by any inadvertent behaviour of his own;

he hated serious views of life : he would doubtless have considered "the Psalm of Life" in horribly bad taste ; that slight faults, or what he would have called such, might be as injurious to the happiness of others as downright sins, would have sounded to him sheer nonsense ; to look into his own heart to search his conscience—would have been troublesome ; if he ever thought of such a necessity—and perhaps here and there a sudden death, a sermon, a stray sentence in a book may have suggested it—he put it aside, with the assertion that such discipline might be good for light-hearted, shallow, excitable men, with no deep thought or sentiment, but to what he considered his reflective, self-contemplative temperament it would be poisonous in its depressing tendency.

Now he felt utterly helpless and unhinged ; why had Roland come at all in his vulgar, coarse materialism—defining passing thoughts into recognised feelings, and forcing him out of the happy pastime he might have enjoyed between Elinor and her sister, into avowing a decided preference for one or the other ?

It had been so pleasant to be adored by Adelaide—she was so young and innocent that he felt no scruple in appropriating her first affections; he had never spoken to her of marriage, he shrank from such a sacrifice. Marriage! why with his limited income it would deprive him of all his necessary enjoyments—he could not keep his health, he knew, if he gave up his horse, nor his spirits if he no longer went to his club or to the opera; besides, Adelaide did not expect it: he was her dearest friend, her Mentor, and if she loved him more than he loved her—“Well,” he said to himself, looking in the open desk he now sate before at several closely-fastened packets of letters, “she is not the first. There can be no harm in kindness to women. I would not wound or grieve such a dear little girl as Addy for the world, and it must make her unhappy if I go to see her less often, and she is so young—if I ever marry some one else she’ll so soon get over it.”

These ideas rather floated than passed through his mind; it would have been painful to give them visible shape. His creed respecting girls’

hearts, analysed, would have been found very similar to a popular theory about earth-worms—they are very tender, and will bleed and break easily ; but once broken, they can live on severed. If he had reasoned on this, he might have deduced the origin of coquetry, and have shown why a woman, whose first love has been trifled with, is merciless—she is henceforth double-hearted.

He had wasted his own feelings in so many transient loves and likings, that his heart had really been cut, as it were, to bits; and had no power of strong emotion left. Still, all that there was of passion in him had been stirred by Elinor Dryden. Her wit, and the charm of her conversation, made him think beyond this, that she would prove a valuable and amusing life-companion to any man.

But the roused mood that Roland's visit had caused, made him now, fatiguing as it was, sit down seriously, and try to place the two sisters side by side, and choose between them.

He liked money for the ease and luxury it procured—not for itself ; and his first thought,

as he began his task, was of Elinor as Adelaide's sister, not as heiress of Flairs.

It seemed to him that she possessed every qualification which could gratify a man's taste, and pride, and senses ; but still she stood out distinctly as an object of worship, rather than as a woman whose whole consciousness of self would be merged in devotion to her husband—try as he would to turn his thoughts from Adelaide, she rose, clouding Elinor's image upon his mental sight, as the fond, humble, clinging, yet supremely useful creature he thought a wife should be. Yes, in all these respects she was well suited to him. She was a pretty, well-informed little girl, too, whom any man might be content to possess. But, how could he marry a girl without a penny, however self-sacrificing ? and then the remembrance of Elinor's queen-like movements and graceful self-possession mastered him again. How brilliant a home she would make ! But she would require dress, and jewels, and all the wealthy and luxurious appendages her sister could live without ; and for the first time Roland's words recurred soothingly—she would be heiress of Flairs !

He did not quite know what this implied. He had heard of the grandeur of the Drydens ; but, as is always the case when a woman has married into a lower sphere than her own, he felt disbelieving and levelling, when poor Mrs. Markham indulged him with recollections of the state and splendour in which her girlish days had passed. He knew Roland himself to be a boaster, and as he was too incurious and lazy-minded to inquire for himself, he had grown to consider the Drydens of Flairs to a certain extent apocryphal, until his first meeting with Elinor.

Then, spite of the inner lack of refinement which a better bred man would have detected, he recognised in her loftiness, her ease, even in her haughty temper, the tokens of a caste unlike his own—the stamp of a society he had never mingled among since he left the University.

Heiress of Flairs ! If he did not fully comprehend the value of this title, at least he knew that it meant affluence, carriages, horses, ease, and comfort, without any balance of exertion on his side for their attainment. He had mixed

too little in good society to care as yet for the position of a landholder, or the inheritance of an ancient name. Thought went on now with bent head, tracing back each sentence of Roland Markham's, and at last paused at one with as dead a stand as a pointer—what had he meant by outwitting Squire Dryden? Slowly piecing it all out, and then stringing the scattered fragments of talk, he began to see his cousin's meaning, and to be aware that Roland's visit had been part of some well-planned scheme. It seemed to him, that to thwart Mr. Dryden's wishes, he would marry Elinor to the first man who proposed for her; but then, with her attractions, would not any one so needy as he knew Markham to be, seek for a richer suitor than himself? and, on the other hand, it might be that Elinor could not marry without her uncle's consent, and Mr. Dryden might not consider him a suitable match. He might last for thirty years to come. Was it likely that she would ever wait for him, even if he wooed her into a promise now, exposed as she would be on her return to Flairs to the homage of men in

the same class as her uncle? The prize was radiant, but it dazzled his eyes. He felt like the fox with the grapes; he did not yet love Elinor well enough to risk peace and quiet for her; or, rather, he cared still so much for Adelaide, that it seemed a pity to lose her for what, after all, might be beyond his reach.

It is a profanation of the word to speak of Love at all in connection with his feelings: but such were his thoughts; and, like most men who mistake sentiment for feeling, he considered himself capable of earnest devotion, if an object could only be found to inspire it.

Still he felt strangely puzzled; so clumsy an arrangement seemed quite unworthy of his scheming cousin. He must see him again soon, and find out exactly what he meant; and if he really were determined to promise Elinor in marriage before she returned to Flairs, she might be free to choose for herself. If this were true, why should not he take his chance? At any rate, he was first in the field; it was not likely she could really love this young Karsé. He believed that, woman-like, she had only en-

couraged the boy because she was jealous of his own attention to Adelaide, and perhaps because the fellow was good-looking.

Two or three engagements stood in his way, or he would have spent that evening in Bloomsbury, and have resolved his doubts. Elinor and Adelaide were not his only amusements ; there was a large family of young ladies, more than one of whom believed herself beloved by Mr. Fisher, blushed at his entrance, sighed when his visits became less frequent, and lived, in short, that sort of foolish, time-wasting existence which such girls call being "in love ;" but Fisher would have said he was not to blame for this. If he bent over one sister at the pianoforte, and whispered soft speeches, it was surely her fault if she attached undue importance to what he only did from kindness, "to please her, poor thing ;" or if he lent another a book with a stray sheet of MS. verses inside, if she chose to interpret into love what was only done to gratify her vanity, it was clearly no fault of his ; he was sorry for them, but it was his one weakness, as he told him-

self; he could not be unkind to a woman, and it was natural to think that the withdrawal of such special marks of his favour must blight a woman's happiness.

But the engagements were fulfilled at last, and he found himself at liberty to seek his cousins.

As he approached the house he became conscious that he was following some one whose appearance revived unpleasant associations. Almost before he looked up, that strange antipathetic shrinking which the presence of some persons will inspire affected him; but when he glanced over the young man's figure, he was not surprised. Without seeing his face, he recognised young Karse.

Was it possible that he, too, was on his way to visit Elinor?—the idea was too irritating to dwell on; but still the unwelcome apparition kept on a-head, crossing every square, and taking every turning that he himself must necessarily follow to reach Mr. Markham's house.

Fisher grew so anxious that it was almost a relief when Maurice, springing forward as if

impatient for admittance, dashed up the steps and knocked at Roland Markham's door.

And then as he turned round and faced his follower, a look of annoyance spread over his face, although his "Good evening" was more cordially spoken than Fisher's.

For as he thought next minute, had not Elinor said that this was her sister's lover, and why, in such joy as that which now filled his soul, should he permit any cloud of vexation to come between him and the image of Elinor—his Elinor? Away, now, with the crouching fears that had kept him speechless; he was kin to Mr. Dryden, and there had been something in the Squire's manner that told him that if he continued to merit his good opinion the claim of blood would not be denied. Across his wild exultation came at times a feeling of shame at his ingratitude to Ben in this eagerness to cast off the ties that hitherto had seemed to bind them closely. "But I shall love him just as dearly," argued the bright-eyed stripling to himself; "perhaps more so, for the weight of dependence and servitude lifted, has unsealed

my heart, and doubled my love for every one."

He had had no leisure for any thought except that of Elinor and love, since he left Karse's bedside. A few lines from the Squire had relieved his anxiety on Ben's account. Love, to his young imagination, unfettered by conventionalities and the social arguments that pluck every feather from its wings, was a gift of God. He did not trouble himself about the future; he loved Elinor so dearly, that she must love him in return; his love would compel hers—they were made for each other. Hers was the high, lofty nature he needed to quicken his sometimes flagging inspirations; but would she, so bright, so beautiful as she was, love him—him whom she had first known as a mere village lad? Still, this only fired his romance; he felt sure the very contrast would deepen her interest—ah, after to-night he might perhaps say her love.

Only Mrs. Markham was in the drawing-room when they entered, and to Fisher's surprise—for he knew his cousin's dislike to an

early after dinner summons—she bid the maid tell her master of the two gentlemen's arrival.

"More to the purpose if she'd sent for the girls," growled Fisher to himself, as he drew an easy chair close to the fire; "and yet I don't know, I'd better have it out with Roland."

Roland, however, did not appear; he sent the maid upstairs with a message to his daughters, and then again to the drawing-room with a pencilled note to his wife, the reading of which seemed to cause great disquiet to Mrs. Markham.

She looked at her two visitors, and evidently tried to execute some commission respecting them, and then looked down at her note again. Fisher came to her assistance.

"How is Roland this evening?"

"Oh, yes, that's what he wishes me to tell you; he hopes you'll excuse him, at any rate till after tea; he's got some sadly tiresome accounts to look over."

"Can't I go down and help him a bit; he's often been glad of help before." Fisher almost

moved towards the door ; he was so anxious to get his course clear.

“ Oh dear no, James, on no account ; he'll not be long I dare say, and besides,”—here she stopped again, looking confused, as if she were going to say something she had been told to keep secret—she was greatly relieved by the entrance of Elinor.

Miss Dryden greeted both her visitors with equal cordiality ; seemingly she was quite unconscious of Maurice's trembling eagerness as his hand clasped hers for a moment, but she looked archly at Fisher and spoke to him.

“ I am afraid you are disappointed only to see me, but papa wants Adelaide's help with his accounts ; she'll come presently.”

This was said in too low a voice to be overheard by her mother, or distinctly by Maurice—who stood much nearer—but he was too full of joy to be captious then ; he caught Adelaide's name, and conjectured Elinor was the bearer of some message between the lovers.

His heart and mind were as busy as his eyes in drinking in the picture she made as she stood

before him—a full length picture, for it was not on Elinor's face that admiration chiefly rested ; the graceful undulating lines of her tall figure, which the sweeping folds of her dress blended into, and seemed to carry off with no abruptness of ending, or if the eye followed them upwards along the exquisitely moulded shoulder to the round smooth throat, on which her queenly head was so perfectly placed, the massive plaits of hair called for fresh admiration, as coiled round and round they glistened in dark and perfect smoothness ; the only fault that could have been found with Elinor's hair, was this uniformity of tint, and this unruffled smoothness ; there were none of the varieties of hue—the golden streaks that tell of the sun's kisses in childhood—or of the chiselled waves that display such gradations of colour so gloriously ; but then this very straight smoothness spoke the silken richness of the tresses coiled in such dark profusion. It has been said before that her features were irregular, and her skin dark, and by daylight rather sallow—but no lover of Elinor Dryden's was likely to note these minor details ;

her eyes were face enough for any woman, always changing, and seemingly to fresh beauty—now liquid with tender softness, with that sort of incipient tear in them that seems like a glistening diamond; now if she were roused to enthusiasm or anger, flashing their brilliancy into the hearts of those who gazed on them, or when their intellectual power revealed itself most strongly—although perhaps this was their least beautiful aspect—they looked steadily, observingly, into other eyes, as if seeking their secrets.

They did this now to James Fisher—he winced under their questioning, and murmuring something which no one could hear, went up to Mrs. Markham.

Maurice felt angry with himself for the timidity that came over him again beside Elinor.

On his way he had felt so bold, so hopeful, so determined to pour out all his heart to her with a fire that should be irresistible; now as she turned away, her lip slightly curved at her cousin's evident want of self-possession, Maurice asked himself how he dared aspire to the love of so beautiful a creature. Almost uncon-

sciously his high elation drooped, and the brightness of his face clouded.

If he could only see Elinor alone; why should he not ask for such an interview? not now, the sudden mistrust young men feel towards each other about women, tied his tongue completely from asking such a boon in Fisher's hearing, but he would find an opportunity during the evening—or he would write.

He spoke to Elinor, but he soon found he had not her undivided attention. Her eyes kept on straying towards her mother and Mr. Fisher.

Maurice grew angry. Why should she care to listen to the talk of a man who never could be anything to her? But Elinor heard "Flairs" and "my brother Wentworth," and her fertile brain was conjecturing what possible interest her cousin could find in either, except with reference to herself. That he was very much interested his bent, listening head and eager manner plainly told.

Maurice could bear it no longer.

Starting from the ordinary words which

seemed to have no power to fix her attention, with an abruptness that surprised Elinor, he said—

“I am just returned from Flairs. I saw your uncle.”

“Saw my uncle!—Where?—how?”

Elinor spoke the first words dreamily; then, as her quick wits took in place, and time, and circumstances, her eyes flashed brightly.

“You have been among the fever then? you ought not to have come here.”

She recoiled from him—for they had been standing close together, and Maurice had drawn nearer still with his last words. Had he been less in love, he might have wondered that Elinor's first thought should have been fear for herself, rather than any enquiry for her uncle; but he could think of nothing but her then.

“Don't be frightened. I waited several days, and even Miss Brownlow says I am quite safe now. I went to see my dear old friend, Ben. You remember him, don't you?”

Elinor still looked ill-assured, and kept aloof.

"I am terribly afraid of infection ; are you quite sure you are safe ?"

"Quite. I must have felt some symptoms by this time, and I never felt so well or happy in my life as I do just now ;" even Elinor's eyes fell beneath his—"but you did not answer my question about Ben."

Something either in her face, or because he had forced his way to the topic that had seemed a barrier between them, restored Maurice's courage.

Elinor's dread of the fever sank in her wonder at his audacity. That his advantages of education, and her excessive condescension, had helped him to conquer the diffidence he must otherwise have felt in addressing her at all, could be understood ; but then how careful and tender she had been in sparing his feelings by her avoidance of any remembrance of their early intimacy, and here he was talking openly and unblushingly of his cousin the gamekeeper.

Had she after so many years of experience fallen again into the error of her girlhood ? had she stooped below her dignity, and caused this

low-born youth to imagine she considered him her equal? The curse of her nature, her proud temper, roused at the thought. She admired Maurice as much as ever, and was just as vain of his devotion, but he must be taught the difference between them at once.

"I remember him, of course," she said. She could keep her voice steady, although her rising colour and the flash of her eyes were beyond her control. "Why should I forget him any more than any other servant of my uncle's? He was your cousin, if I remember rightly, and brought you up from a child."

It would have seemed natural for Maurice, at once to tell her of his discovery, and of the error under which he had been living; but there was something so stinging, so almost hateful in her pride, that his own rose like adamant against it.

He changed his mind in an instant. How dare she despise Ben. She should not be gratified by knowing, by even suspecting that he was glad to be quit of the relationship—a gladness for which he indeed despised himself—oh! so intensely now. He would not tell her his secret;

he would compel her to like him, to love, at any rate to honour him as the gamekeeper's cousin. Whether his own love would survive the process he did not inquire curiously just then—his wrath was too deeply stirred.

He gave her back her glance as proudly—far more firmly.

“You are right.” And he went and stood beside Mrs. Markham.

It all passed so quickly, and the words had been spoken in so low a tone, that nothing had been overheard; yet, as Fisher looked up in the young man's face, he knew that he had been, as he would have called it, “snubbed” by his cousin Elinor.

Fisher had been vainly trying to find out something definite about Flairs, and the heiress-ship; but Mrs. Markham seemed either thoroughly ignorant or bewildered on the subject. The fascination of Elinor's presence, with no counter attraction in Adelaide, or dread of collision with a rival, drew him across the room to her now.

She smiled one of her sweetest, most magical smiles, and he felt there was no retreat left for

him. Heiress or not, no creature had ever exercised so strange a power over him, and his soft yielding nature abandoned itself to the sweet influence. He spoke almost in a whisper—his usual habit with women. He had the gift, the serpent gift some men possess so rarely, of flattering with an imperceptible caress of tone that doubles the meaning of the words. Even the proud Elinor hungered after the clogging honey. At first she had meant to punish Maurice for his daring, by withdrawing her attention from him and bestowing it on her cousin ; not, as she told herself, from any feeling of coquetry, but simply to assert her dignity, and to make him feel his presumption ; but by degrees her proud eyes drooped, her cheeks glowed, as she sat and listened. If she had looked across the room she might have been startled by the fiery indignation—the intense scorn that strove for place in Maurice's countenance, while he stood watching her and saw, too, that when his rival bent over her till his lips nearly touched her cheek, Elinor did not shrink away. She only blushed a shade deeper.

He at first had tried to talk to Mrs. Markham, but her knitting—she was experimentalizing on a new, intricate pattern this evening—rendered her a slightly incoherent companion, although the spasmodic efforts she made at conversation showed a desire to keep him beside her.

But he could not stand it much longer. He must go—he was unwilling to be thought discomfited and abashed by Elinor's haughtiness; but he could not bear to witness such treachery. Had not she told him that this man loved her sister, and was she not striving to attach him to herself? for, like the rest of us, in his anger justice quite forsook Maurice—he never thought of Fisher's influence; he looked on him as a foolish victim to Elinor's vanity, ensnared from his proper allegiance.

Why should he stay and witness her heartlessness? besides, in the temper in which he felt himself, he knew he could not submit to her father's insolence.

So he took his leave, half inclined when he reached the door to turn back again, for the

look of triumph on Fisher's face told him plainly how much his rivalry was dreaded. It had been very hard to bear Elinor's cold good-night, beneath the eyes of his triumphant enemy.

At the stair-foot he met Mr. Markham and Adelaide.

"What, going already, Mr. Karse? Have they done anything to affront you?"

Roland Markham laughed as he spoke; but the words jarred. It seemed almost as if Elinor's father knew what her conduct had been, and then he thought of poor betrayed Adelaide, and how soon the eager excitement would fade out of her face when she saw what was happening in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST SERVICE IN THE ASH GLEN.

It was a bright Sunday morning, and the Ash Glen was again full of movement, as the villagers ranged themselves beneath the fractured stone they now called "the Pulpit." The air was drier and colder than it had been; the women shivered and muffled their hands in their shawls, as they stood about waiting for Mr. Brownlow's appearance; but they were less listless in movement, less despairing in face. Death was not so frequent among them. The clergyman was very late this morning; and when at last he came in sight, he too seemed to feel the

change of weather—he looked pinched with cold.

Mr. Dryden was late also. He had been to see his old gamekeeper, whose recovery was a very slow one—hindered doubtless by his agitating interview with Maurice. There had been so many questions to ask, so many directions to give the nurse, that the Squire had been forced to spur his horse to full speed till he reached the brow of the hill, whence he must descend on foot. His face was all a-glow with exercise, and as he took his place near the clergyman, the contrast made Mr. Brownlow's pale, hollow cheeks seem almost ghastly to those who stood closest.

He began the service, but his voice sounded weak and strained beyond its power. There was more cadence in it than usual, for its only fault was monotony, and as he read the verse of the Psalm—"Oh that I had wings like a dove," there was a depth of pathos in his tone that moved his hearers strangely.

A vague sense of something unusual crept over most of them, in the midst of their

devotion ; even Mr. Dryden looked round more than once at his pastor. But save the deathly pallor, and the more than ever devout countenance, there was nothing to cause disquiet in Mr. Brownlow's appearance.

Suddenly, while all heads were bowed, there came a longer pause than usual—a pause recalling the thoughts that were straying—arresting those that were fixed in prayer ; then a sound more like sobs than words. There came a moment of doubt and hesitation ; but before the disturbed, terrified people had risen to their feet, Mr. Dryden stood beside the fainting man whose head had sunk powerless on the fractured stone.

The Squire looked round for help, but the people stood terror-struck, incapable either of movement or comprehension. Then a frenzied cry from a woman, standing among the nearest, spread the awful contagion of Fear—she snatched at her two children's hands, and looked round with wild, frightened eyes at her neighbours.

“Run, run fast for our lives !” she screamed ;
“it's the doom come on us—it's the fever !”

As if the pestilence were in bodily shape among them, at her words the whole assembly turned to fly from the Glen.

Hitherto they had, in coming and going, avoided any close contact, and had stood or knelt, while the service lasted, several feet apart ; but now in the speed urged by their terror, they rushed pell-mell—a closely herded rout, some of the children stumbling and falling over the broken fragments of rock that strewed the Glen.

At first the Squire waited, with the calm, unimpulsive determination so usual to him—he who did not know Fear was slow to believe her power. Some of these men—all of whom had in their time benefited by his ministrations, would help to bear their Pastor home. But when he saw all turning away—even those, ashamed to join the rapid flight of the foremost, slinking one behind another—all standing farther and farther aloof from himself and the inanimate form whose dead, nerveless weight he knew he could not sustain alone, he delayed no longer.

He could not move from the fixed, strained posture, by means of which he prevented the body from falling sideways down the declivity, but his left hand was free. He raised it high above his head, and spoke out loudly—

“Shame on you, Starby men! will you leave him who has tended your wives and your little ones in their last hour, to die here alone?”

Some of the men stopped, looking dogged and unwilling: a woman who had stayed among the hindmost jogged her husband's arm, pushing him towards the pulpit, following herself the lead she gave. Four or five other men fairly turned when they saw some one else willing to run the risk—perhaps they were ashamed to be outdone in courage by an old woman. Then Wentworth Dryden's long practised self-command helped him well—giving to his orders the clear calmness that must ensure confidence and obedience in the executors.

He told one of the men to stand near, ready to help him if he needed help; the woman was to hasten back to Starby, and see that the doctor and the servant at the Parsonage were prepared

for Mr. Brownlow's arrival. The other men were to bring hurdles from one of the sheep pens on the far-stretching Downs. He told them exactly where they would find the nearest, and then as his assistants hastened off to their tasks, he turned to look again at his friend.

Was this Death itself?—The livid pallor, the inaudible breathing, the utter lifelessness of each pendant drooping limb, struck terror to his heart, that it was so. And he could do nothing to solve this awful doubt—nothing but loosen any throat pressure caused by the neck-cloth. He felt that if life still lingered its hold was so feeble that the slightest strain might snap it altogether, and so he stood still in dumb patience waiting the return of his messengers.

They came, after what had seemed a dreary waiting, and Mr. Dryden, still with only his left hand to guide and direct, showed them how to fasten the hurdles together, so as to make a sort of litter. Then with an exertion, the strain of which told on his muscles for weeks after, he gently and gradually lowered the senseless form, till it rested securely on the coats and jackets

which by the Squire's orders the men had placed on the rough hurdles.

He chose out the oldest and quietest, showed them how to raise the litter without giving a sudden shock to its burden, and then bidding them take the downward path, he walked silently beside Mr. Brownlow.

Always hard in judgment, he had harboured stern thoughts against the cowardly people who forgot all gratitude in selfish fear ; but now, as he walked slowly on, suiting his pace to that of the bearers, it seemed to him, too, that the end had come—that there was no more hope for Starby. For the last few days there had been a lull in the pestilence, and this colder temperature had raised the doctors' hopes high ; but, if their Pastor were thus suddenly cut down in their midst, who could say how far terror—the mixed flight of the congregation, and the absence of his comfort and counsel,—might not tend to revive it in its first direful form ; for it never occurred to Mr. Dryden to think that he himself was the stronghold of the people, and that without his strengthening presence, his helping

guidance, Mr. Brownlow's resources would have been exhausted long ago.

Selfish the Squire might be—and he was selfish on some personal points—but of his own value, as a man, he had no self-consciousness, although he knew that his wealth and his position were often of service to others.

As he moved slowly along, his thoughts grew darker and more painful. He had to consider the first steps to be taken. If when they reached the Parsonage, the doctors should confirm his fear—that life had fled; and as he thought, a new and tenderer sadness came across his anxiety—Cecil—that bright sweet blossom, only to be associated with sunshine and happiness—the creature alone left on earth, who had crept into what the blight of his life had left him of a heart—he must crush her;—it would be his lot to bruise and wound her fond loving nature by the tidings of her father's death. No, he could not, he would not do it! Why was it his curse—his doom—to be forced to bring pain to all who had loved him, or whom he had loved? And then recovering himself from this

strange, sudden outburst, so rare, alas ! now to his iron-schooled temper, he told himself that if needs must be—if there were indeed no hope, or but little left of life, then the very tenderness of his love for Cecil would fit him to inflict this sore wound with less of bitterness than another.

And while all this turmoil of doubt and dread and agonised sorrow wrenched and tore at his heart, the men who walked beside the Squire noted his stern, firm bearing, and even tread, and settled with themselves how truly it had been said that good as he was, "he had no more of softness or pity than one of the grey stones in the Ash Glen."

CHAPTER XIII.

CECIL.

CECIL sat by her father's bedside. The sun that chequered the white dimity curtains, as it shone through the small lattice panes, fell on her hair and face with a brightness that might have made you think the year was months older. The hair still rippled in glistening waves round her head, but it was bound tightly—more to keep it out of the way, than as if arranged to advantage. Her soft woollen dress, too, came down to her wrists, without any white relief, against the small hands, almost like a child's in the pink prettiness of their dimples.

She sat still—so very still, looking intently at her father ; but though the face she gazed at was pale and fever stricken, though there were the dark rings round the features, and the pinched lips and nose, that might have alarmed an older watcher, there was hope in the bright, young eyes, and the eager, parted lips, as she bent down her fair head, to listen to his breathing.

At seventeen—and Cecil was not much older—how can we believe that those we love best must leave us ? The heart stands still at the mere suggestion, and then beats on in rapid, vehement action, asserting the falsehood of such a fear. No, death is impossible ! it cannot come near us then—something must be done, it must be arrested ; for the young ever seek in action a refuge from the suspense of thought : and Hope is so strong—it has not been bruised and battered by many downfalls—its bright pinions, radiant with rainbow tints, are all unsullied, and bears us ever to the sunny vistas of what Must and Ought to be—soaring in gleeful blindness out of ken of the dark, shrouded

sorrow that Shall be! for is it not inevitable? and if we ask ourselves in soberness the question, are we not all the gainers by these very stains and scars that tell where the quivering flesh has been stricken? The knowledge may be long in coming, for flesh and spirit both strive against the chastisement—nay, for a while, rebellious thoughts, and world-hardened hearts, may seem to negative this; but in God's own good time he will show us why our best loved, our all of blessing, has been taken away, and will makes us own that all was done in Love!

But this hard lesson—the lesson that chastens the gay spirits of the boy and girl into the subdued cheerfulness of the man and woman—was still unlearned by Cecil. Her mother's death had brought deep sorrow, but her last illness had been so gradual, Death had been looked for so long before he came, that there had been less of shock than of sadness; and then Cecil's energies, and warm, loving heart, had so taken her out of herself, in the desire of comforting her father, that the loss at the time had been less felt than afterwards; and the

retrospect of sorrow is so different to its sure anticipation—time takes so much sting away, brings so much of comfort. Even now, while the bright eyes filled with tears, as Cecil thought what a blessing and solace her mother's presence would have been in this trial, she could give hearty thanks that she had been spared so much affliction—ah, and her father, too! for how it would have added to his cares, if his wife had been exposed to the infection.

Cecil had no thought of risk to herself. Mr. Dryden had at once written to her, telling her of her father's critical state. He felt bound to do this, the doctor gave such slight hope of recovery; but he advised her not to come to Starby—he would send her daily intelligence. At present her father showed such slight signs of consciousness, that her presence could be of no actual comfort to him, and so far as nursing him went, she, of course, would be far less efficient than those whose daily occupation it had been during all these sad weeks.

Cecil's reply was to start directly she received the letter; and before her arrival, Mr. Dryden's

fears on her behalf had become modified. There came a sudden lull in the fever—no new case declared itself in the village. Had it exhausted itself, or was this last victim a sufficient holocaust to its rapacious appetite? Still there was the risk that she might take the infection from her father; and valueless as the one life seemed to be in comparison with the other, the Squire could not suppress a mortal shiver of fear, when he saw the fair young girl take her place by the bedside.

Mr. Dryden came into the room now, stealing in so softly, that Cecil looked up surprised at his sudden presence.

Bending forward to listen yet closer, and satisfying herself there was no change in the breathing, and that her patient was still unconscious, she glided softly to the other end of the chamber, and taking the Squire's hand in both hers as she passed him, obliged him to follow her.

He was surprised to see her smile.

"Ah, you have not looked at my father yet," she said softly; her face sparkling with the

pent-up hope, she had been longing to pour out to some one more sympathising than the nurse; for the woman had shaken her head doubtfully when Cecil affirmed that the morning light had shown her how much better the patient looked. "Oh! dear, dear, Mr. Dryden, I think he will do well, now; his face looks so much calmer, and he lies so much more still; and his breath, instead of struggling as it did last night when you went away, is faint and low. I cannot hear it, unless I bend down and listen."

"Ah!" a spasm of pain contracted the stern face as he turned it from Cecil's scrutiny, and went up to the bedside. She was following him, but he motioned her back. Then in his turn he went up to her, and taking her hand, led her not only away from the bed, but outside the door into the little gallery that communicated with the sleeping-rooms.

Cecil looked surprised, almost restive; he felt the small soft fingers move uneasily in his strong clasp; but Mr. Dryden through life had been accustomed to act without vouchsafing explanations, at any rate, till he thought them

requisite. He looked into the next room, the door of which stood ajar ; the slight creak with which it opened made a woman lying on a sofa there start up quite awake.

“Martha, have you had any sleep?”

“Plenty, thank you, sir. Miss Cecil never left me till four o’clock, and she came back again at seven ; and by the look of the morning, it must be nigh upon ten now.”

“Not quite so late. Still, if you are awake, you had better go in now. I want to speak to Miss Cecil.”

He and the nurse were looking into each other’s faces, but Cecil did not see the grave, significant glances that encountered each other. The bright sunshine had helped her hope ; a dull, misty sky would have perhaps depressed it. She saw nothing of warning in the Squire’s wish to speak to her ; it was his confirmation of her belief in her father’s recovery ; he doubtless thought this quiet sleep best left undisturbed : they had not had a moment’s talk since her arrival three days ago—it was his kind plan for giving relief to her anxiety. If he thought

her father still in danger, he would not take her away.

It was almost the first time she had gone into the study since her arrival, and with her heart full of warm hope, it seemed as if the faded room had a cosy, home look, full of welcome. Her elastic spirits rebounded from the pressure they had been forced into, and she almost laughed with joy as she looked at the Squire.

"How long will it take him to get well, do you think?—How long will it be before we have him here sitting in his own chair again, and watching my gardening through the window?"

Mr. Dryden went up to the window she pointed to, and stood looking through it as intently as if he saw some one gardening there now.

He was fairly puzzled and disturbed. He almost thought Cecil heartless. He, chastened by sorrow, by years of doubt and suspicion, could not in any way realise the great heart-leap by which her joy had carried her at once

on to the firm ground of trust and relief in what she hoped for—a phase of mind at any time puzzling to a man of his age, how much more so to one who had forfeited the power of trust at all.

He had brought her there to tell her that he had seen the doctor who had visited her father just before she took the nurse's place that morning, and that his opinion was that Mr. Brownlow was slowly sinking, would probably not last out another day, that he would sink from simple want of power to rally again; but this sudden, apparently certain idea of his recovery was an obstacle he had not counted on. He knew she had been hopeful throughout, but he had trusted that her own singular quickness would have detected the change in the symptoms, and prepared her for the end, and instead of this, she had entirely misinterpreted them.

Then came into Mr. Dryden's head, what will come to us all sometimes when our thoughts are seemingly most full of the joys and griefs of others, a glimpse of self—the sort of glimpse the golden edge of a cloud will give of the

blackness of its centre, an indication rather than a distinct view—this was the first consciousness he remembered of having ever shrank from giving a fellow-creature pain. He might not have taken pleasure in doing it before, but he had fulfilled it as one of the inevitable duties of which life to him consisted. Duty, what else was there to live for? Those who set up any other standard, or who talked of amenities as things to be fused in along with the harder stuff, were either fools or knaves. But whence it came he knew not; at once in his bosom sprung to its full height and growth the softest, most remorseful pity for Cecil. He could not tell her, he could not crush this butterfly hour of gladness, so soon to be shrouded in the sable veil of mourning. Why must his hand inflict this deep bleeding wound on the soft, fair, young creature he would have given his life to save from suffering? If Mr. Dryden's heart had not been for ever seared from the love of women, and if he had first known Cecil in womanhood instead of the baby plaything she was when her

father came to Starby, perhaps the strange, strong love he bore her would have had an admixture of passion in it ; now it was all fatherly.

“ How long do you think ? ” repeated the sweet voice.

He answered her question as if he were thinking of something else.

“ I don’t know, I am not good at guessing,” and he bent his head down again.

Cecil was well used to his abrupt, reserved ways ; one great secret of her influence over him was her perfect comprehension that he must be left alone, that his moods could not be forced into what others considered necessary and fitting. She saw that she had asked him a question she should have reserved for the Doctor, when probably his head and heart were full of anxiety for many others besides her father ; for although she had heard that the fever had stayed its ravages, she knew that Ben Karse and many of the people remained in a very precarious state. She stooped down and fondled the old tabby cat, that sat looking into the fire heat.

The Squire felt how coldly he had spoken,

and he knew too that Cecil would not disturb him again till he turned round and spoke to her.

What was he to do? It would kill her perhaps to let the blow fall without a warning; must he be the one to do it? but this was only a whispered thought. If she must be told, no one could do it with the same love as himself. Still he could not go to it of set purpose, he must let other topics unstring the rigid pain he was bearing, or his manner of telling would be cruel instead of kind.

He turned round from the window, and came close to her.

“Have you had your breakfast, Cecil?”

“Yes, thank you; you are so kind to think of me.” He made a gesture of impatience—he always avoided thanks; his own nature shrank so from giving them, that he scarcely believed in their reality from others. “But nurse has tea ready for me when I take her place in the morning; every one seems to try to spare me trouble.”

She looked up earnestly in his face—there was a slight quivering of her lip; she would gladly have wept out her joy and thankfulness,

now that the sound of another voice had stirred her sympathies almost beyond control, but she did control them with a strong effort ; she would not alarm Mr. Dryden, or let him think her unhappy, for the world.

He saw the quivering lip, and strangely moved out of himself by reproachful fear that he had grieved her—grieved her, his darling, when her cup of sorrow would so soon be brimming over in a bitter tide—he bent down and kissed her smooth forehead.

For an instant she shrank back, and the colour flew into her cheeks. No man except her father—not even her Uncle Erasmus—had ever before kissed her : but the terror was only momentary ; she took his hand in both hers, and pressed it gently.

“I am so glad to be here again,” she said, “you cannot think how long and anxious the days seemed when I got back to Oxford.”

“Got back to Oxford ? I thought you were there all the time. I wrote to you there.”

“I went there at first. Did not papa tell you ? Ah, I suppose you had very little time for talking.

Aunt Jane let me have no peace until I went on to London, and as papa made no objection, and I had not seen either Uncle Erasmus or Aunt Jane for several years, it seemed my duty to go, and afterwards I returned to Kintry. But," faltered Cecil—for a darker frown came into Mr. Dryden's face than she had seen there before—"do you think I was wrong to go so far from Starby?"

The Squire had turned away from her again while she still spoke, and had resumed his old place by the window. No outward sign, except that dark frown and his silence, told the fierce conflict that was raging, the anger and disappointment he was mastered by.

When at last he did turn round and speak, Cecil's pale scared face helped to modify the icy coldness of his tone.

"I suppose you saw your uncle's pupils sometimes?"

"Yes, every day; that is, one pupil: the other always went home to dinner, and in the evenings."

"Then you saw," he cleared his throat as if the words stuck there,—“Maurice Karse often.”

He fixed his stern vigilant eyes on her. How could she help blushing under such a look, had the question been of the most trivial kind? the vexing consciousness of rising colour now made it spread over throat and face, even up to her forehead.

Mr. Dryden could have gnashed his teeth in anger. What had passed between these two? But he stood to all outward appearance calmly waiting for her answer.

"Yes, I saw him every day, but," she went on proudly, for she resented the Squire's suspicion, "I was only in London a fortnight."

Her manner roused Mr. Dryden to consciousness of his own; roused too the hidden chivalry buried out of sight long ago, which only Cecil had power to recall to existence.

"I beg your pardon," the Squire spoke quite humbly, "you are of course free to go where you please, only I felt angry with your uncle and aunt for letting you mix on equal terms with a person who is your inferior in the eye of the world;" he saw the lips parted, eager with an interruption, and he went on in a more na-

tural voice—"We won't speak of this again, Cecil; you and I are too good friends to nourish disputes about anything. I can quite imagine that your Aunt Mary is a duller companion than your Aunt Jane."

"Oh, yes,"—Cecil smiled, she was so relieved to see her friend himself again, that her anger at what she thought narrow-minded prejudice, softened—"you may laugh at Aunt Jane and call her eccentric, but she is so really good and unselfish, that you wish to be only half as excellent."

"I should have thought my little Cecil well off in these very qualities herself."

"You spoil me, you know," said Cecil; then a graver shade came over her changeful face, and she looked up earnestly at him. "You told the nurse you wanted to speak to me; had you any special reason, dear Mr. Dryden? or was it only because you thought a change of scene would do me good?"

It must come now. He could not tell her a falsehood, and yet the very perfectness of her reliance taught how his words would crush out

the bright hope that had been sustaining her.

His head moved restlessly as if to escape her gaze, but as he glanced at her face he saw a quick look of fright come into it, and then a slight cry burst from her lips.

"My poor, dear child,"—he grasped her hands, gathering them between his own, as if he would infuse his strength into her nature.

He had hoped for passionate weeping ; he knew—at least he had heard—that tears were a great solace to women ; but Cecil did not weep, her face grew pale and stiffened, and her eyes dilated painfully. If she would only cry or speak, Mr. Dryden felt his task would be much easier.

She did speak presently, but with an effort as if her throat were dry and exhausted.

"Is there no hope?"

"None."

He put his arm round her, and tried to draw her to him ; he wanted her to have pity on herself, to break in some way the sudden frost that had congealed her senses. She stood up straight,

stiff, insensible to his appeal, but seemingly quite collected, when she spoke again.

"How long will it be coming?"

He felt constrained to answer her questions as laconically as she put them; even to himself it was strange the power this young girl's self-control exercised over him.

"I fear to-night, but he may last longer."

"Then I ought never to have left him," said Cecil, and she looked almost with indignation at the Squire.

His saddened eyes, his worn face, the touching mixture of affection and entreaty where she was used to see only the lines of calm thought, melted the hardening, swelling heart, and brought away some of the burden that was stifling her.

She snatched his hand again, and kissed it passionately.

"Oh, forgive me, dear, dear Mr. Dryden. I ought not to blame you; it is my own blindness that has deceived me."

She sobbed the words with the tears that now came gushing out to her relief, but she had soon

mastered them, soon wiped away their traces at the thought of the little time left her ; and then, trying to look cheerfully at the Squire, as if to show him he might trust her self-command, she went slowly up-stairs to her father's bed-room.

BOOK THE SIXTH.

SHADOW

CHAPTER I.

A CHANCE MEETING.

ELINOR stood, dressed for walking—she had sent up to Adelaide's room to know if she would accompany her. In another minute her maid brought the message—

“Miss Adelaide has a bad head-ache; she cannot go.”

Elinor was glad to be alone—she did not ask any questions about her sister; and she went out to walk in one of the dismal square gardens near.

“Whenever will Maurice come again?” she thought; “was he really offended?” and then

she began to wonder whether her father had been rude to him when they met on the stairs ; for although Markham had not expressed any opinion, he had been so sulky for a couple of days after Maurice's first visit that she knew how much it had annoyed him. .

She must manage that neither James Fisher nor her father should be present the next time Maurice called ; and she walked round and round the dingy old garden, meditating how this could be brought about.

She could not mistake James's devotion, but there was no use in making Maurice a witness of it. It was plain poor Addy had deceived herself.

"These quiet girls are strangely sentimental and fanciful ! however, of course it is only fancy, and she will give up all idea of caring for him now."

If she had gone up to see her sister she might have realised that this "giving up" was not so easy a matter as she imagined.

Adelaide was in her room, but she was not lying down—she had just risen from her knees,

her face wrung with hopelessness ; it was vain to pray against the bitter feelings that would rise towards Elinor—frightening the poor girl's timid nature by their vehemence.

She had fought bravely against emotion on the night of Maurice Karse's last visit, when she followed her father into the drawing-room, and saw James and Elinor sitting together, and she had said Good-night so naturally to her cousin that he believed her quite unsuspecting. Fortunately she had broken through the nightly talks beside her sister's fire ; she shrank from finding herself alone with Elinor now.

She scarcely knew how she had dragged through the last few days. James had come once again, and she had slipped quietly away to bed, and, to her relief, no one had remarked on her disappearance.

And now she thought that she had not counted all the cost—she had not reckoned James's visits among the miseries she had to suffer.

Elinor might not go back to Flairs for weeks, and as long as she remained in London this

torture would go on—no, she could not bear it ; and yet she must never betray her secret : if James were to become her brother no one must know how she had loved him once.

“It is so cruel—so very, very hard,” she sobbed, as she stood leaning against the door of her room ; “James loved me till she came—he would love me now if she went away, and she does not love him—she cares and thinks more about her friend Mr. Karse. What is it about Elinor that makes me not love her when I see men near her ? am I jealous ? am I so mean, so foolish as to compare myself to her ?” She drew a long, sobbing breath, and stopped to think. “No, it is not that, it is because she seems to think all men her property ; she is so sure that they must think her beautiful, and like her better than any other woman—I saw it even with that old Mr. Brownlow. Cecil is lovely—lovelier than Elinor, but I do not think she would be so—so bold. Oh ! what is coming to me ! I don’t seem to know right from wrong—how can I say that a stranger whom I have only seen once is more womanly than my own sister !”

Then came the thought of the dull, dreary blank that life without James would be, and the certainty that he loved Elinor better than he had ever loved herself.

In this misery Adelaide wondered at her own insensibility to the wretchedness of others ; how often she had heard and read of lives blighted as hers was by disappointments—disappointments in love ; in children, where a son, for whose well-doing parents have spared neither spirit nor flesh for the hardly-earned gains they expend on him so liberally, turns out a dunce, or worse ; in speculations—a merchant, whose very existence slips away with the failure or dishonesty of others ; in success—artists and authors who toil on, staking their health, their life almost, on some venture which has required incessant work, and, harder still, incessant thought, to bring it to perfection.

All these and other visions passed before her mind. She always told herself she hated worldliness, but how like she had been to the world in her thoughtlessness of others' sorrow.

It is not true that misery always deems its

own burden heaviest. There is a healthy soul discipline in some, in most sorrows, which by lowering our own standard of desert lets us see when the first blinding tears are over, that things might have been worse, and this not from elastic hope as impervious to the rain-drops of misfortune as caoutchouc itself to material showers, but from the very humbling I have spoken of.

If we had been dealt with as we deserve, or if such and such a trial had been added to the one we now endure, how much more we should have suffered. I do not say this mood will last, but it will come to those who do not harden their hearts wilfully against it, by fits and starts. It soothed Adelaide for a while, but then all was again unendurable. She must go through this weary day and many others with no vista of hope beyond. She must face Elinor, and try to resent her conduct as little as she could, for any open speaking between them now must make matters worse.

A light tap at the door, and her mother entered.

Adelaide had caught up a brush and was smoothing her hair—she only half turned

round, with a desperate effort to look cheerful and at ease.

Mrs. Markham's manner was very unusual. She did not speak at first, but stood still, fingering the back of the chair from which Adelaide had risen. Was she going to ask questions? A mist began to thicken before her daughter's eyes, her head felt confused and giddy; she must speak or laugh, or do some desperate thing to arrest the explanation she foresaw on its way.

Instinctively Adelaide felt her mother's timidity to be as great as her own; if she could only force herself into courage she might conquer yet.

"Do you want me, dear mamma?"

"Yes, Addy; I thought you were lying down. How is your head now, dear child?"

If Mrs. Markham had had the courage to put her arm round the trembling girl she would have yielded; as it was, the tender, beseeching tones, the look she knew there was in the eyes she dared not meet, tried her sorely, but she struggled on.

"Quite well, thank you; I think I have been helping papa too much with his accounts, my

head and eyes have both felt heavy for several days."

She could look round by this time and face her mother with a smile, and poor Mrs. Markham, although only half satisfied, for she loved Addy too tenderly to be wholly deceived, still found no power to ask the painful question she had intended.

"Ah, you think so!" and she retreated towards the door, feeling almost as frightened of Adelaide as she always was of Elinor—so firm a barrier had this withdrawal of confidence built up between them—then as the yearning of motherhood again gave her the courage which had urged her up-stairs, she said, almost imploringly, "you are sure it is only the accounts, darling?"

But Adelaide had her back turned now, and was brushing her soft, smooth hair into a tangled confusion—she could trust herself to answer bravely.

"Quite, thank you; and thank you, too, for coming to see after me."

Mrs. Markham was still not satisfied —

she had watched the attachment springing up between James Fisher and her youngest daughter, with motherly pride and interest, but ever since her conversation with her husband about them she had fancied there was a change in Adelaide.

She had grown silent and pale—her appetite failed her, she was spiritless with the children, and seemed always trying to be alone. Mrs. Markham was not clever nor recollected, but she was observing, and although she did not arrive at the conclusion quickly, she had lately made up her mind that there was, as her husband would have phrased it, “a screw loose” between Adelaide and James.

She went down-stairs, and seated herself in front of the fire, meditating on the best means of winning her daughter’s confidence.

She was not long left in peace. Elinor came in, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks with the rare bloom on them that so much enhanced her beauty. A slight shiver ran through Mrs. Markham, as she thought of the contrast between her two children.

Elinor might be cold and haughty, but she was certainly a very distinguished looking young woman. Mrs. Markham remembered a timid, gentle Sir Henry Forrester, whom her parents, she had been told, intended her to marry. She could never have hesitated an instant between him and Roland. Why was she so hard on James Fisher now?

None of Mrs. Markham's children showed her much observance; but Elinor scarcely ever took the trouble of answering her. To-day, however, she was unusually gracious, and sat chatting till dressing time.

She had walked round and round the square till her patience was exhausted, and still she could devise no plan for bringing Maurice to her father's house, when she could be quite sure of James Fisher's absence. She could write to him, but it would be too great a condescension; and yet, when she remembered the pride of his parting look, she did not believe he would come again, without being specially asked to do so.

The thought led her back to that evening.

Why did she want to see him? His insolence had been intolerable. And then came back, also, the remembrance of the love his eyes had told so plainly, and how much handsomer his eyes were than her cousin's. Let him be a relation of Ben Karse, or of whom he would, there could be no comparison between him and any admirer she had ever had, so far as appearance went; and his genius, too—there must be something remarkable about him to make her feel so anxious for his good opinion. She must see him again—but how?

Suddenly she remembered that in that first desultory talk, to which she had paid such little heed, he had told her that on certain days in the week he read at the Museum, in the afternoon. She stopped short in her walk, and tried to recollect—yes, this was one of the days. In ten minutes she could be in the street he must pass through on his way to Mr. Brownlow's. And suppose any friend of her Uncle Dryden's met her walking alone in London—she drew her veil down, and hesitated an instant.

It was an absurd thought. No one who had

known her at Flairs would recognise her now ; and none of the fashionable people she had mixed with in Vienna and Paris would ever come to such an out-of-the-way place as Bloomsbury. Mr. Brownlow or his sister were her only risks, but she was very far-sighted, and they were not people to be easily overlooked. She looked at her watch ; it was just the time at which Maurice had said he left the Museum. She fancied he had mentioned this with a slight emphasis, as if inviting what she now contemplated, and the fancy had made her affect a greater interest in James Fisher's talk with her mother. She had no more time to deliberate—there was not a moment to spare.

She looked down the street first, and then, drawing a long breath of relief, towards the Museum. Yes, there he was, walking fast towards her, with the springing, elastic tread she had remarked first at Flairs. He was looking in an open note-book in his hand, and did not see Elinor till he came up to her.

- He started, and then was passing her with a grave bow.

There are some men from whom no teaching could ever elicit grace ; but in Maurice it was a natural gift. It completed his attraction for Elinor.

She smiled up at him reproachfully, and stood still.

He forgot all his resolutions, and they had been vehemently taken, against ever again putting himself within reach of her fascinations ; and he found himself shaking hands with her.

"I thought you had left London," she said, with the half timid manner so bewitching in a self-possessed woman. "You have not been to see us for a week."

Maurice's face altered. Her words destroyed the present illusion, and took him back to the past.

"I felt myself an intruder, Miss Dryden, and that's a feeling I don't care to have twice."

He looked as if he were ready to bow and pass on. How exactly he reminded her of the Maurice Karse she had known at Flairs. Still a boor at heart, then. But she had determined to conquer him, so it would not do to quarrel.

She knew by instinct that she dared not laugh at Maurice, as she did at her cousin.

"Shall I tell you what I think, Maurice?"

"Yes, if you like;" he still spoke sulkily, and as if her words were indifferent to him.

Elinor's eyes sparkled, but she controlled every other sign of indignation.

"Well, then, I think you are very exacting. You forget that in my father's house I must be attentive to all his visitors. I told you Mr. Fisher was engaged to my sister; at least, I believe there is an attachment, only it is not to be mentioned at present. When Adelaide is in the room, you must have seen for yourself, no one else has a chance of speaking to him; but as of course I feel deeply interested in him, you, who know the secret, should be the last person to quarrel with me about it."

The colour rose in Elinor's cheeks, but yet she looked straight into Maurice's eyes.

He could not doubt her; and with all the ardour of his generous nature roused out of its usual reserve, he accused himself of jealous suspicion, quite forgetting that James Fisher's de-

votion to Elinor had not been the beginning of the quarrel.

He thought in his own mind that Fisher was a heartless deceiver, and was playing double between the sisters; but if Elinor took all his looks and words for brotherly affection—and he could not doubt her own assertion—it was only a proof of the innocence and purity of her mind.

He begged her pardon frankly; and when she asked him if he would come in after dinner, the delight in his eyes showed her that peace was established between them.

“You need not say you met me,” she said, as they parted. “My father thinks it more of a compliment if people come unasked.”

CHAPTER II.

SORROW.

MR. DRYDEN is seated once more in the writing-room at Flairs. His looks have not passed through so many weeks of unrest and anxiety unscathed; but there is a striking change of physiognomy, a briskness and alertness of expression, a less rigid pose of reverie—tokens left by the life of action and resource into which his hitherto studious and contemplative existence had been forced.

He looks perplexed now—he has pushed away the sheet of paper on which is a commenced letter, and leans back in his chair thinking.

The letter begins—"Dear Miss Brownlow," and although some time has elapsed since those words were written, still no more are added.

It is a very difficult letter to write; no doubt of it; and as Mr. Dryden now confesses to himself, one which he can not complete without consulting Cecil herself.

While he rings the bell to summon her, I will tell some of the causes of his perplexity.

As soon as possible after her father's death he brought the poor sorrowing girl to Flairs. The fever ended with the seizure of the clergyman; but though the doctors pronounced infection over, it was thought better not to risk the presence of strangers at his funeral, and thus on the Squire devolved the whole charge of comforting Cecil.

The quietness of her sorrow frightened him. She was so gentle, so utterly subdued and resigned to the will of others, that it wrung his heart to see her. He had hoped that the change to Flairs would revive her, but she only seemed to droop more and more languidly each day.

Mr. Dryden consulted Northover, as to whe-

ther she thought the young lady required doctor's care ; but the housekeeper first shook her head, like a sagacious Newfoundland dog, and then putting it on one side, gave it as her opinion that it was nothing but "giving way."

"You see, sir, there are those that keeps control over their bodies, and others that keeps control over their minds, and some that do both, though they're not common. I beg your pardon, sir, but there's nothing that's not under our own control—feelings and all the rest—if we only look at them the right way."

The Squire pleaded that Miss Brownlow was very young to be left without father or mother, and that he did not consider that she gave way to violent grief.

"Bless me ! sir,"—and the head was jerked on one side more violently than ever,——"why, you've lost both your parents, and I've lost mine over and over again, counting aunts who brought me up and so on, and if we'd given way as Miss Brownlow does, we'd have sunk inch by inch into our graves till we found the grass growing over our heads. If you'll believe me, sir, she

only wants rousing. A little wholesome talk now, or a little ornamental needle-work—but, no ! not she—there she sits hands in lap, gazing out into the park, as if she saw her poor pa's ghost minding the sheep."

But Mr. Dryden could not agree to this view of the subject.

When he found that Northover was not uneasy about Cecil's health, he decided that the shock had been too sudden, and although she had borne up at first, the reaction was now telling on her, and that this torpor and supineness were the natural results of the wrench her whole nature had suffered. He felt most unwilling that she should, at any rate for the present, be removed from his own guardianship and from the quiet seclusion of Flairs.

But on the previous day he had received a letter from Miss Jane Ann Brownlow. In reply to his account of Cecil's state, and his wish that she should remain with him, she enclosed a letter written by Cecil's father at the beginning of the fever in Starby, in which, in the event of his death, he entrusted his child to her care and

that of his brother Erasmus ; and Miss Brownlow suggested that, however obliged they might be by the Squire's kindness, their home ought to become Cecil's as soon as possible—"very likely the change would do her good."

It was a very common-sense, practical letter, doubtless, but it was expressed in a determined cut-and-dried set of words, that could only have been written down by a strong-minded woman. Decided, opinionated words are unpleasant enough when spoken, but written in a formal, though female hand, they seem thoroughly odious. The Squire respected Miss Brownlow, but he always shrank from her as men of his fastidious type do from strong-minded, strong-willed women. He did not object to female talent ; but he detested contradiction and management. If Northoyer had not possessed a more than ordinary share of tact, spite of her eccentricities and an ever-present safety-valve to her tyranny, in the shape of "that dummy," Tomkins the steward, she would not have maintained so long a reign at Flairs.

One thing was very plain to the Squire :

Miss Brownlow had decided hastily. Maurice's term of residence with his tutor would not expire till the following autumn, and he felt quite sure her father had never intended Cecil to be brought up with Maurice Karse. As the Squire thought of this, and remembered Cecil's confusion on the day of her father's death, a look almost of agony passed over his face.

"It might have been—" he said, and the hard look told of a fierce, inward struggle. "It would have fulfilled my dearest wishes for them both—but it is too late. I will take it as my curse, my punishment for what has gone before!"

For a long time he leant forwards on the table, his face buried in his hands. Then he rose suddenly and paced up and down the room. He was debating a momentous question with himself—affection and inclination urging one set of claims; pride, what he considered justice, the other. It was not a pure question of right and wrong; the alloy of many warring motives was too powerful to let conscience speak distinctly. She had been so long stifled that her

voice could not be trusted in this matter, even if it could be heard at all.

He could neither decide nor conquer, at least not then. Sternly forcing his mind back to his occupation, he again seated himself at his writing-table, and re-read Miss Brownlow's letter.

No—it could not be. If her aunt did not know what was fitting for a motherless girl, he must act a father's part to Cecil. She had not seen much of Maurice as yet ; and if they never met again she would forget all about him. So he argued, with the iron despotism of a man unused to deal with women's hearts ; but after the emotion she had shown it would be utter folly to shut her up for nearly a year, with such a youth as Maurice, and cruel to both. All other considerations apart, what could Miss Brownlow be thinking of in risking an attachment between two young people, at present wholly unprovided for. Cecil had a mere pittance—just enough to keep her from dependence ; and Maurice's future, so far as she knew, must depend on his own exertions.

He was not kept long waiting after his sum-

mons to Cecil. She came in pale, heavy eyed ; her long trailing dress, with its deep crape border, seemed to drag her down to earth with its weight ; the round, slender throat looked painfully white and delicate against the intense blackness ; so did the small hands, hanging listlessly on each side of her, but she was lovely still, though her loveliness was too transparent and unearthly.

Mr. Dryden rose, and placing a chair for her, he led her to it with as much courtesy as if she had been one of the stately dames hanging framed in the North Gallery.

“ I sent for you, my dear, to know whether you would like to stay a few months here with me, or whether you would rather go at once to the house of your Uncle Erasmus ? I have a letter from your aunt on the subject.”

His voice was not quite firm as he reached the last words. Suppose she decided against remaining with him after all ? Well, in that case he must find another tutor for Maurice ; he did not choose to show her her father’s letter. She might have a superstitious feeling about

obeying it ; he was resolved to leave her judgment unbiassed.

Cecil looked up in surprise ; there seemed a kind of stupor in it that gave a painful expression to her face, as if she were trying to understand something beyond her comprehension, but there was no blush, no conscious look. Mr. Dryden saw she was not thinking of Maurice, and he sighed, half with relief, half with disappointment.

" Oh, to stay here if you please—unless I am a trouble to you ; am I, dear Mr. Dryden ? "

The look of sudden distress, and the gathering tears almost overcame the Squire, but he answered her cheerfully.

" Why, you are quite a comfort to me, my child ; it is very much to a lonely man like me, to have something young to talk to, sitting opposite him at meal times, though I fear it is dull for you. "

" You are so very kind, "—and she burst in a sudden fit of hysterical sobbing, which in her weak state she could not control.

He was frightened, and he moved towards

the bell, but Cecil caught his hand and held him back, telling him as well as she could, that she was best let alone.

He yielded, as he almost always did to her slightest wish, and walked to the window. He had a strong aversion to tears, even in Cecil; it was hard for him to believe that she could not have prevented this paroxysm—the thought helped her composure more than he knew. When next he spoke there was no longer the tender thrill in his voice that had moved her so strangely.

“Well, then, Cecil, I will write to your aunt and tell her we have settled for you to remain here, at any rate till the autumn. I am going to send for Elinor at once, she will be glad to find she is to have you for a companion; and Cecil, I think if you rode with me every day, instead of staying in-doors so much, it would do you good. What do you say about it? Very well then, my dear, we will ride over the Downs to Stirmouth this afternoon.”

By this time he had seated himself at his desk again, and Cecil felt she might go.

She loved the Squire dearly, and had never felt afraid of him before, but there was something in the solemn grandeur of Flairs—the severe politeness of Northover, the automaton and speechless exactitude of the rest of the household, and the isolation in which their master lived among them—that was gloomy and depressing. So far as her own personal feelings were concerned, the dead stillness of the house was soothing. She could not even hear her own footsteps on the thickly carpeted stairs; the only sounds were those caused by the rustle of her dress on the matting of the long stone galleries—there was no outward disturbance to the nursing of her grief. It seemed to Cecil that she had nothing left to live for, that her place in existence was crushed away; she had no duties left to fulfil, there could be no use in living for herself.

If she remembered Maurice, it was to shudder that during the last few weeks of her father's life, her thoughts had been diverted from him by a stranger, one of whom Mr. Dryden had almost forbidden her to think at all. I am not

sure that if Cecil's sorrows had been less overpowering, she might not have dated the slight awe with which she now regarded the Squire, from that very conversation; but her heart was so deadened to every other affection, but that which now clung so agonisingly to those who could return it visibly on earth no longer—that she was lifeless to other feelings. Even the prospect of living under the same roof with Elinor—from whom she had always shrunk with decided aversion—scarcely stirred her, gave her no more of pain than the prospect of a daily ride with the Squire—and riding had always been her favourite amusement—gave her of pleasure, after her long severance from all country pursuits. It did not signify what happened, she was only grateful to be left undisturbed, grateful when the formal meals were over, and when she was once more alone in her room for the night.

Mr. Dryden was so accustomed to pass his evenings in either reading or writing, that it was natural to him to imagine Cecil would do the same. He felt afraid of her grief, and

awkward at interfering with its indulgence ; and yet as days went on, he sometimes doubted whether it was quite right to yield to her—whether, as he had self-elected himself her guardian, he ought not to take a father's authority also. But all his life long he had shrunk from explanations, and their subsequent awkwardnesses.

Dread of an awkwardness ! How many loving hearts has that selfish fear torn asunder—hearts that a few honest, tender words would have welded into one ; how many fathers would joy in children and grandchildren, who now live alienated from their offspring for lack of the fervent unselfishness which would have braved an awkwardness. How many brothers live as strangers because they could not summon the manliness which would have bared one heart to the other, and showed each the wounds he had all unwittingly inflicted. Well, there is one comfort, if the people are good people, if the shrinking proceeds as much from natural unconquered temperament as from selfishness, all will be made right some day—in Jerusalem the

Golden there will be no secrets, no unrest, no morbid cares.

This is an exaggerated strain for Mr. Dryden's reserve towards Cecil, still he might have spared himself much former suffering by resisting this very failing.

CHAPTER III.

MAURICE CALLS ON ROLAND MARKHAM.

THE Squire's prejudice against Miss Brownlow would have been doubled if he had seen her read his letter; her handsome mouth—at least its upper part—rose till it nearly touched her nose, and her face and figure stiffened themselves into an attitude which would have been greatly admired in those “stocks” of former days, in which our grandmothers practised courtesies for the minuet.

“The fidgety old frump,” she exclaimed, throwing the letter across to her brother, “teaching me propriety, indeed!” then with a

sudden remembrance of Maurice's presence at the breakfast-table, she stretched out her hand in terror, lest Erasmus should—in an absent mood, proceed to read the contents of Mr. Dryden's missive, aloud.

But Erasmus was not absent this morning, and was astonished at his sister's behaviour, to which he had not the slightest clue.

"Who is your correspondent, Jane Ann, and why do you call him names?"

She pretended to read her letter again with so much absorption, as not to hear him.

Maurice saw that he was not wanted, and he presently sauntered out of the room, although his tutor implored him to stay and examine one of the greatest entomological curiosities he had ever met with, a Vanessa Io ! caught alive in the month of February.

"And a very good specimen too," said the sage, pulling out and wiping his never absent magnifying glass. "Come, Maurice, you must have a look at him. Why ! bless my soul, the boy's gone ! hopped away like a grass-hopper."

"And a very good job too. Really, Erasmus, you get so stuffed up at odd times with grubs and beetles, caterpillars and chrysalides—to say nothing of butterflies and moths, which you seem to make small account of now—that I wonder how you keep any room in your brains for Latin and Greek, and such things; as to the common affairs of life, I suppose you think it my province to look after them. Well, perhaps it is,"—this was said more quietly, her little explosion of wrath against her dearly loved brother evaporating at the sight of the ludicrous perplexity it occasioned, for Erasmus adjusted his spectacles, then took them off, and wiped them, and having replaced them on his nose, took up the magnifying glass also to obtain a clearer view of his sister's meaning. "Perhaps it is," she repeated, "only you do put me out when you won't take a hint."

"A hint!" Erasmus's eyes rolled in utter bewilderment. "My dear Jane Ann——"

"There, don't," and she laughed, all her anger giving way in the desire to restore his composure; "I mean, that I wanted Maurice

to go away, because Mr. Dryden's letter refers to him."

"Eh, what? Bless my soul! nothing amiss, is there? Mr. Dryden's not going to remove him, is he? Why, the next six months' reading is the very cream of the whole thing; just, in fact, what we've been working up to."

"Don't frighten yourself." He tried her patience a little by starting off on a false scent. "He doesn't want to take Maurice away, but he refuses to let Cecil come here."

"Eh, what? But I thought you had settled she was to come. Poor dear child, she can't live by herself."

"No; but now do listen, Erasmus, or you will never hear the right story. Your precious Squire—I should like to shake him—thinks I am not a sufficiently proper and duennaish person to have the charge of my niece Cecil. Upon my word, I should think as I've kept myself out of harm's way all these years, I might be trusted."

Miss Brownlow stopped, feeling that her indignation was more than she could manage.

"But you must remember, my dear, you have always had me to help you," said her brother, with his grave smile.

The joke restored her equanimity ; the notion of Erasmus's interference with her propriety was too amusing.

"You'd have been a capital help if I wanted it. Now, if the Squire had doubted your power of managing matters he would have hit the mark, for I believe you never dreamed that Cecil and Maurice could fall in love with each other."

"Oh, they have, have they?" and Erasmus's eyes twinkled as if he really were growing interested at last.

"Good gracious me, no!—At least,"—and here a shade of trouble came over her comely face—"I hope not. No, it can't be," and she pursed up her mouth with the stern determination with which a woman puts forth the true feminine logic that what she does not wish to be is not.

"Why can't it be?—is there any objection? I'm sure they are an uncommon nice-looking pair."

“Patience me, Erasmus, what are you thinking of?—to think of you turning match-maker at your time of life, and Mr. Dryden turning into an old maid at his, is enough to—well, it’s sufficiently remarkable. But now you really must not be so imaginative, but only listen.”

And then she read him the letter through, not of course leaving it to his own unassisted judgment to comprehend. She would have interpreted the right, *i. e.*, her own meaning, of everything and everybody, to all the world, if she could. There never was so philanthropic an exponent of the views and motives of mankind.

“I suppose it is as you say,” said Erasmus, fairly talked into submission; “but my first impression was, that Mr. Dryden thought more of sparing future sorrow to the two young people than of reproving you; but I won’t contradict you, my dear, so there’s an end of it.”

And as he saw clearly that another torrent of explanation was impending, he made a speedy retreat, thinking what perhaps other men, blessed with as good, devoted sisters as Miss

Brownlow, have thought before, "What a blessing that there is a study in the house into which no one can enter without permission."

He looked at Maurice, whom he found lounging at the window, with awakened curiosity, as he would have done at some rare "specimen." It was a new light to think of him as a person likely to love or be loved by his niece; and then a bright idea irradiated Mr. Brownlow's often misty mind. Maurice had been most unstudious and moody lately—perhaps he was pining after Cecil. The new world of life his sister's talk had opened had the same interest for him in its strangeness that a sensation novel would have to a middle-aged recluse: he felt an intense curiosity to know if his last guess were correct.

"Maurice," he said suddenly.

The youth looked up, evidently roused from an unpleasant reverie.

"What are you thinking about? I'll wager, now," said Mr. Brownlow, going back in thought to his own young days with the fresh simplicity

of a man wholly unused to the world, "that instead of Plato you have been studying the composition of a Valentine. You haven't much time to lose, you know; the day will soon be here."

Maurice started. This was quite a new phase of mind in his tutor. Had he heard of his attachment to Elinor? And then as a sudden conviction crossed him he looked uncomfortable and angry, and answered sulkily that he had never had anything to do with Valentines, and certainly didn't mean to begin such nonsense now.

It was gall and wormwood to see his grave tutor smile down at the paper, as if he knew a great deal more than he chose to tell. Maurice was glad it was one of his museum days; he should be alone in the afternoon, at any rate. He had taken up a course of Universal History lately, but I fear his reading was sadly disturbed by visions of Elinor Dryden. It was extremely irritating this morning to see how suddenly his absent tutor had waked up, and to be obliged to control his dreaming fits.

He took his hat and went out rather before his usual time.

He had spent a very pleasant evening with Elinor. Her father only came in at the close, and even he had behaved more courteously than on the former occasions. Elinor had been delightful,—not quite the ideal creation that had lingered in his mind before their quarrel. An abruptness of manner to her mother and sister had slightly ruffled the image he tried again to see reflected in his mind; and just before he left there had been something of a deeper nature, something from which he instinctively recoiled, spite of the fascination that drew him to her.

Just as he was bidding them good night, Roland Markham, in his joking way, had said—

“By-the-bye, Mr. Karse, who was the lady you were so deep in talk with this afternoon? I thought it was Elinor, but some one came up to speak to me, and you were both gone before I looked round again.”

Maurice's lips had parted to answer that Mr. Markham's guess had been correct—he could

see nothing to be ashamed of in what had passed between himself and Elinor—but she interposed.

“Papa, how could you think I should be out walking by myself? I took my walk in the Square garden to-day—nor am I in the habit of talking to gentlemen in the street.”

“Well don’t be in a puffet, Nell; the reason I thought it was you, was because—— No! I don’t think I shall tell you; but at any rate you might have felt flattered if you’d seen the lady. Mightn’t she, Mr. Karse?”

Maurice muttered something, which Roland Markham understood merely to be a confused acknowledgment of his last words. He hugged himself on having, as he termed it, “put a last-ing spoke in the young fellow’s wheel with Elinor;” but he was really so angry at finding him there again, that when he left home next morning he told both his servants that they should be instantly discharged if they let that gentleman in any more.

Maurice walked home aghast at the daring falsehood. I have said before, that his ideal of

a woman's mind was very high and pure ; it seemed something like profanity to be forced to doubt her truth. Truth—why it was the very keystone of Love ; the honour, the very safety of domestic life must crumble without it. His vivid imagination seemed to see the spot spreading and spreading upwards till it spread even over Elinor's face, and blotted out all her beauty. He suffered terribly all that night the torture—which for their comfort men can only endure in youth—of dis-illusion ; he had been worshipping the false Una, and Duessa had revealed herself ; but with morning light came calmer thoughts. He might have misunderstood Elinor, though his reason told him this was impossible ; but at any rate he ought to give her a chance of exculpation. He called the same afternoon. Miss Dryden was out, and Mrs. Markham particularly engaged. For three successive days he received the same answer. He loitered on his way to and from the Museum, but without success. Then he wrote to Elinor—not on the subject of her falsehood ; instinctively he knew how much easier he could believe her spoken than her writ-

ten word, and he still clung to the memory of his former feelings strongly enough to wish to be convinced that she was true.

There was no weakness in this. All Maurice did he did strongly, when once he was sufficiently roused to put his hand to the work ; and in proportion to the strength of the passion he had cherished for Elinor, was the difficulty he felt in believing her unworthy of it, and in freeing his heart from its ruins. He merely wrote to know if he had been denied admittance advisedly, or whether she really had been " not at home " on the three previous days.

The answer came by return of post.

Elinor had been at home, but had not heard of his visits. She thought the servants must have made some mistake. She would take care, that the next time he called, in the afternoon, he should be admitted. She did not say she had questioned the servants and had learned her father's prohibition. If Maurice knew this he would never call again, but she tried to make the housemaid see that her father's orders had only of course referred to Mr. Karse's evening visits.

The letter had reached Maurice that morning. It was charmingly worded. There was no mistaking Elinor's earnest wish to see him again ; but for one little trifle he would have obeyed her behest and have called the same day, but she had underscored the word afternoon, and coupling this with the utter absence of explanation for the previous denials of admittance, he could not help suspecting the truth. Suspicion grows ranker than even a garden weed. If he had not had such grave cause to doubt Elinor's truth he would have hated himself for his hesitation now.

It was on this unhappy, fermenting state of discontent and distrust, that Mr. Brownlow's joke fell with the effect of yeast. The dim, half - formed suspicions, floating restlessly, churned up suddenly into a fierce foam of indignation against Roland Markham. He had not only dared to forbid him his house, but he had gone to his tutor and given some jeering account of his love for Elinor, turning him into ridicule.

He had hardly patience to sit through the

early dinner, and then he took his way with stern determination in every line of his young face to Roland Markham's office.

If he had sent in his name he would probably have been told that Mr. Markham was particularly engaged, and that there was no use in waiting to see him. It seems to me that business men tell as many falsehoods of this kind as fashionable ladies, when it suits them ; but by one of those fortuitous accidents which happen just as often in real life as in fiction, he met Mr. Markham face to face on the doorstep. He was leaving office early—he meant to see James Fisher on his way home, and get it settled about Elinor.

His face darkened when he saw Maurice.

"I am sorry to detain you, Mr. Markham, but I shall be greatly obliged by the favour of five minutes' private conversation."

Roland was taken by surprise. Maurice spoke with a dignity that he could never have attained himself. He began to think, after all, there must be some mistake, and that he must belong to one of the county families.

Before he had recovered himself, he had led the way into a private room.

Maurice spoke directly the door was closed.

"I have called on you, to ask you why I am denied admission at your house?"

If his manner of saying these words had been less composed and dignified, Roland Markham would have thought them, spoken by a mere youth, the best joke in the world; now he hesitated before he answered.

"If ladies happen to be out, or engaged, I suppose young men are usually told so," he said, laughing. "Really, Mr. Karse, it is very hard to come here and bully me for the proceedings of my womankind."

There was a sneer in his laughter that stung Maurice out of his self-control.

"Will you give me your assurance, Mr. Markham, that you do not object to my calling at your house, when I leave your office?" He was resolved not to cross the Markham threshold again without distinct permission from the master of the house.

The colour flew over Roland's face. The assurance of this boy was rather too much.

"I neither object, nor the other thing. I am not sure, however, that you would be more fortunate in finding the ladies at home to-day than you were yesterday."

There was no mistaking his meaning now—he sneered openly as he spoke.

"Then I am to understand that you have taken measures to prevent a meeting between Miss Dryden and myself? I have a right to ask your reason for this, Mr. Markham."

And he placed himself against the door with a determination that would have roused Roland's admiration, if he had not been so angry. He was obliged to be angry. Unless he gave cause of quarrel he could not get out of his difficulty.

"You may understand what you please, and be hanged," he said; "but first understand this, young man, I don't choose to be bearded and called to account by anybody; certainly not by those who thrust themselves into my house, among my children, without any references as to parentage, respectability, or even the com-

mon passport of society—an introduction from any mutual friend.”

The lightning of indignation in Maurice's eyes checked him for an instant, but as the young man tried to speak he went on, “No, I'll finish what I've got to say; if you will force yourself where you are not wanted, by George, you shall take the consequences. I don't want you any more at my house, no more does my daughter, and that's the long and short of it—she knows what you are dangling after as well as I do, but if you think the heiress of Flairs would throw herself away upon a dependent on her uncle's bounty, a man with a name one never heard of before, why you're grievously mistaken, that's all; and now, sir, perhaps you will be so kind as to leave me.”

“I will in one moment.” The insult was so gross that Maurice had had time to regain his dignity. “But, Mr. Markham, it is a pity you should also be mistaken; if you wish to know my real name and position, I refer you to Mr. Dryden, whose explanations will satisfy you. In birth I consider myself your daughter's

equal—you need have no fear that I shall again attempt to visit your house, although you might have secured that result by more temperate behaviour, and, as I cannot believe Miss Dryden shares your sentiments, I shall not trouble you to interpret her feelings any further. Good-day, sir.”

“I wish I’d knocked him down,” was Mr. Markham’s soliloquy, as the door closed on his visitor, “and what’s this confounded nonsense about Dryden? I’ll write and ask the old screw—no, where’d be the use? he never answered a letter of mine in his life; certainly, I never wrote him a pleasant one after the first: no, I’ll worm it all out of Elinor—if she knows this boy’s history, she’s been as close as wax; if he’s some poor relation it looks very like a dodge to keep the property in the family. I remember hearing that when Wentworth Dryden cut off the entail before he married, just to spite any boy we might have—confound him!—there was an heir-at-law out in the West Indies; now, it’s just possible, he’s such a cranky, queer mixture, that he’s raked this boy up, somehow, and wants

to marry him to Elinor as a sort of double restitution to the family for cutting off the entail; however, with a little patience and a little time, even if Elinor knows nothing, I'll soon find out if that West Indian left a son; if he did, and this is the boy, so much the better—it will double my revenge to baulk such a very great scheme so completely. I must speak to James seriously, to-morrow. Confound that young fellow's insolence—I didn't give it him half roundly enough—the way in which he said he believed himself my daughter's equal—as if he thought me about fit to be her footman.”

CHAPTER IV.

DEATH.

MR. DRYDEN hurried along across the bridge, and through the hanging wood, springing over the obstacles in his path almost as Elinor had done years before, till reaching the top he swung himself over the fencing, and passed swiftly on in the direction of Karse's cottage.

For sad news had come up to the House that morning—Ben was dying! at least that was the message he had sent to Mr. Dryden.

He had recovered slowly from the fever, and although aged and broken, had regained much of his former appearance and cheerfulness, but

apparently he had taken cold, for the only account the old woman gave who now lived in his cottage, was that "he had been tooked with the cold shivers over night, and that when she went to him in the morning he seemed to be goin' fast."

The remembrance of her despondency and fatalism at the time of the fever, helped Mr. Dryden's hopes now ; he sent off to Starby at once for the Doctor, and hastened up to Ben.

But when he reached his old servant's bedside, he saw that all hope was indeed over. Ben was already speechless, but not unconscious, for a bright gleam of recognition flickered on the pale, sunken face, as the Squire bent over his bed.

He laboured painfully for speech, but it would not return. By degrees Mr. Dryden learned to interpret his looks, and in obedience to them, he sent the old woman from the room.

But when he found himself alone with the Squire the sufferer's agony for speech increased. The Doctor came and looked at him. "Life is passing slowly away," he said ; "probably it is

only the intense will to speak what is on his mind, that prolongs it."

Slowly—slowly the hours pass, and still the wistful gaze is strained on the Squire's face, and still, at times, words seem to form on the powerless tongue.

Mr. Dryden pondered what it could be—he could not think of any weighty secret which it could be in the power of Karse to communicate. It could not be anxiety about Maurice, for since Ben's recovery the Squire had given him his solemn assurance that the young man's future should be cared for as if he had been his own son, and Karse had warmly expressed his gratitude.

He blamed himself severely now for having forbidden Maurice's return to Flairs; how completely he had separated him from the guardian of his youth, but latterly some undefinable instinct had warned him not to receive Maurice while Cecil remained with him, and he had not chosen him to visit Ben while he could not admit him at Flairs.

Perhaps it seemed strange that this idea had

only just dawned ; Ben was pining after Maurice now. Could he be sent for ? no, it would be useless. But he might tranquillise this restless anxiety by the mention of his name. For it had become unendurable to witness — to see those earnest eyes, now more like the eyes of some imploring, hunted animal, fixed on his face, to see the lips moving in impotent efforts at speech which would not come, but died away in hoarse, inarticulate sounds.

He proffered pencil and paper, but the fingers had lost power too, and fell away feebly from their imposed task.

The Squire bent over the bed.

“ Ben, are you wanting to see Maurice ? ”

There came a wistful look, and then he shook his head ; and again there was an eager, hungering glance.

A sudden conviction flashed on the Squire ; there could be only one interpretation to that look. It was a question. And what question was it that kept this spirit lingering on the threshold of departure, till it should be answered ?

Once more he forced his whole attention to

analyse the dying man's gaze. As he did so, its meaning deepened, or seemed to deepen, with the new key he had to its interpretation—to deepen into far-off thoughts; to be questioning the past, not the present. And what of the past—what shadow troubled Ben's soul now—on what event did he desire the curtain to be lifted, and light to shine in, before all was closed in darkness?

There could be but one, and that—

Mr. Dryden rose suddenly from the bed-side and paced up and down. His face contracted, and perspiration broke out on his forehead, in the strong wrestling in which he and his pride were matched.

A sound from Ben roused him.

The purple shadows on the face were more defined. The hand of Death was more and more visible, and yet with its approach came no calm; the struggling soul had not yet resigned itself to go.

And was it true that a word from him would calm this agony—would satisfy this longing desire? It might be so—it must be tried.

He turned suddenly, wrenching himself from the grasp of the spiritual foe, and again bent over the bed, closer, much closer than he had bent before, till his lips touched the ear of the dying man, and whispered—

“Maurice is my own son. I cannot own him yet, but I love him dearly, Ben. Before he dies, he shall know who was his father!”

The words acted like a spell. The anxious, strained gaze changed softly into one of deep thankfulness; the struggling, restless expression soothed into ineffable peace. The whisper, which had been, as it were, forced from the pale, stricken man by the bed side, had loosed Ben's last tie to earth; his eyes no longer sought the Squire's, they closed gently, as if the time yet left must not be distracted by even the sight of earthly objects;—and so life ebbed away, so painlessly, so peacefully, that even Mr. Dryden could not have said when his old friend ceased to breathe. . . .

He was gone, then—the only link that held Wentworth Dryden with any pleasurable association to the past—the only being whom he had

ever trusted, and whose faith had withstood even the approach of suspicion. He had not realised how strongly affection had clung round this last record of younger days, till his place was empty.

The fever had, directly or indirectly, robbed him of the only two beings who gave a human interest to Flairs and its neighbourhood. Life looked more lonely than ever before him.

He was very, very sad. All the gaiety he had summoned to cheer Cecil's loneliness flagged, and the pale, haggard look, came back to his face.

But this did more to rouse Cecil from her apathy of grief than any mere forced cheerfulness.

She grew alarmed at his changed looks and his silence, and devoted herself unremittingly to his comfort and consolation. It was the first time in his life that the Squire had ever received sympathy from a woman; and, worn out and exhausted as he was, he resigned himself to the sweet and soothing influence as entirely as we abandon ourselves to repose after fatigue.

The old confidence between them seemed once more renewed—there came no vexing mention of Maurice to disturb it. Even when the Squire wrote to tell the sad news to him, he did not say to Cecil what he had done. Open as he was to her on all subjects, it seemed to him wiser and safer that on this there should be silence, at least till time should have obliterated any impression that Cecil's fancy—for he would not believe the wound had gone deeper—might have received.

CHAPTER V.

A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

THE only person wholly undeceived by Adelaide's silent endurance was James Fisher. He had seen her lips quiver through the smiles she forced them into on the night when she virtually yielded him up to Elinor. He resolved to try to share his attentions more equally between the sisters for the future. It would be so easy to explain to Elinor that Adelaide's feelings must be studied a little. If she seemed to resent this, he did not quite see how he should manage—but he did not think she would—he believed her worldly wisdom to be as great as any of her

other gifts, and this was one of the secrets of her fascination for him.

But on his next visit, as has been said, Adelaide disappeared directly after his arrival, and he could treat resolution, and yield himself up to Elinor without any irksome duty plucking at his conscience.

He loved Elinor now, he told himself, as he had never loved before ; and yet he shrank from seeing her again in Adelaide's presence. Distasteful as one sister had grown to him beside the other, he yet revolted from the idea of giving her pain. If they had only lived apart, all might have gone on so unconsciously, and so happily. As it was, a woman was such a tender, morbid creature, that the slightest attention shown to another crushed her immediately under a sense of her own imperfections ; for he had loved Adelaide too long not to be acquainted with some of the self-inflicted sufferings of her poor little heart, although he either could not, or did not, allow himself to appreciate the depth of her affection. Men soon got over such things, he argued, and women's natures were so

much shallower, so much more flexible, that in a few months she would forget she had ever cared for him, except as a cousin.

He was sitting before a blazing fire, reading a novel, and meditating between the chapters on the perplexities of his own position, when a letter was brought for him—a letter he shrank from opening. It was from Roland, and it was either to borrow money, or to ask his intentions with respect to Elinor.

“He is such a reckless, intriguing fellow, and nothing seems to answer with him.”

But when he had opened and read the letter, he looked more anxious than annoyed.

It was to ask him to go to Markham’s house that evening, to give him the best advice he could, to aid him in thwarting Mr. Dryden’s schemes against Elinor’s happiness.

Something had been said at his last visit about a possibility of Mrs. Markham going away from home for a change, and James had secretly hoped she meant to take Adelaide with her. He had kept away for several days, trusting that at his next visit he might see Elinor

quite alone. If he had known all that had passed before Roland wrote that letter, he would have felt still more disquieted.

Mr. Markham had gone home in a temper to quarrel with an angel if he had found one sitting at his hearth-stone, but instead there was his daughter Adelaide pale and heavy-eyed.

A shadow of coming hope had made her at times happier since Maurice Karse's last visit. Surely Elinor must care for him, or she could not have looked at him or talked to him as she had done; and Adelaide had noticed the bright flush on her sister's face when he went away, and the dreamy listlessness of her manner next morning, with eyes that had loved too well not to know the tokens.

If Elinor loved Maurice she could not love James too. She wished now for her cousin's next evening visit as much as she had previously dreaded it; but this excitement was almost as trying as the previous sorrow, for although her sister might only care for James's admiration, still she was too sure that his love had gone from herself.

Her pale face irritated her father—he was tired of it ; he believed she was making herself an imaginary victim, and that James had never in any way encouraged her hopes. Therefore he asked her in a very surly way to give him his writing things, and to tell the servant not to lay the cloth till he had written a note.

Mrs. Markham looked up from her knitting.

“Oh, Roland, it is just dinner-time !”

“Dinner-time !”—he added a very unnecessary word,—“I suppose dinner-time was made to suit me, and it doesn’t to-day.”

“Dear ! dear !” sighed Mrs. Markham. She was afraid of her husband’s angry moods, although he rarely vented them on her, but she could not resist that truly feminine cowardice, teasing, yet not so as to get herself into trouble. “At any rate, you’ll tell me who this important person is who must be written to before dinner.”

“Oh, James Fisher. Can’t you hold your tongue when you see I’m busy.”

“James, I’m sure it’s waste of time to write to James, for he’ll very likely come to-

night. It is longer than usual since he was here."

I scarcely know what made Roland Markham look up just then into his young daughter's face. She was drinking in her mother's words with an eagerness of hope that could not be mistaken. He glanced quickly on to the mother, and it seemed to him by the smile she gave to Adelaide that there was some secret understanding between the two. He was ruffled and angry enough to misconstrue anything.

"And if Fisher should come here this evening," he said in the same coarse, insufferable manner in which he had spoken to Maurice, "there is no need for you to look pleased about it, Adelaide; he only comes here to see one person, and that's Elinor."

To his great surprise his meek daughter turned on him with glowing cheeks, but with calm dignity.

"I know it, papa; he has shown it very plainly," and then she walked slowly to the door, and went away.

It would be hard to tell what Roland Mark-

ham felt ; he repressed his feelings so quickly that he scarcely knew what they were, except that if listened to, they would lead him astray from his darling project of revenge on Wentworth Dryden. A suppressed sob startled him ; his wife was sitting crying, hiding her face with her hands.

“What in the name of heaven and earth, Elinor, can be the matter with you? You’ve been glumpy and out of sorts enough, I can tell you, lately, without plaguing a man’s life out by such baby nonsense. You know I hate it.”

“I’m not doing it to tease you, Roland, I can’t help it ; but I’m going”—and she moved up from the sofa—“I can’t stay here with you after your treatment of Adelaide.”

“Oh, confound Adelaide and the whole business ! I’ll tell you what,” he said angrily, and he pushed his chair back from the table, “many a man would turn round and swear at you, Nell, if you led him such a life just because he writes to ask a friend to come and see him. It’s more than I can stand, I can tell you.”

Rude as he was sometimes, they rarely quarrelled, but his tone sounded more serious than usual, and Mrs. Markham hesitated.

"I think you ought to reason, Roland, and not to scold that poor dear child when she has behaved like an angel. As to James Fisher, I'm sure I shall not care if I never see him again; and I dare say it's very wicked and unnatural to say so, but I know we were all much happier before Elinor came."

The struggle with which she said the words overcame her, and her tears fell again faster than ever.

She tried to check them, for she did not want to irritate her husband still further against Adelaide, neither did she wish to reveal the secret the poor child had so bravely guarded; but to her surprise he came up to her and kissed her.

"There, don't be a soft-hearted goose, Nell; you trust to my judgment for doing what is best for your girls, both of 'em. Why, you've trusted me all your life, old woman; you're not going to turn against me now."

What could she do, loving him as she did, but return his kisses, and whisper that she had been cross and silly, and that he should do what he liked, she was sure he knew best; but a sense of having in some sort betrayed Adelaide came over her afterwards, and she exerted herself surprisingly to avoid any chance of a quiet talk with her before dinner.

But James Fisher did not appear that evening.

"When Mr. Fisher comes show him in here," Mr. Markham said to the servant, as the cloth was removed on the following day; and his wife, taking this as a hint for the exercise of her promised submission, left the room, followed by her daughters.

Elinor felt strongly tempted to know what all this meant. She liked planning mysteries and scheming herself, but she did not choose to be involved blindfold in those of other people. Her thoughts were distracted by Maurice; she was both angry and surprised that he had not answered her letter in person. She did not care to see James Fisher to-night; she should be glad if he did not come upstairs at all; and

yet with the perversity of her strange, wayward will, directly she heard him arrive, her thoughts strayed from Maurice, and she seated herself at the piano and began to sing, by way of reminding him of her presence in the house.

With what of strength there can be in a double heart she loved them both ; or, if such a state of feeling be impossible, her better self, her higher faculties, yearned after Maurice, while all that was earthly and vain clung to the man who so well understood the art of winning her.

Mr. Markham began the conversation by rubbing his hands, and informing his cousin there was no time to lose.

"About what? I don't understand you." Mr. Fisher spoke sulkily ; he did understand his cousin perfectly, but he was determined he should speak out quite plainly this time, before he did so himself.

"Why, in consulting together." Markham was disappointed, though he took care not to show it ; he fancied James was so deeply attached to Elinor, that the hint of anything

affecting her happiness, ought to have brought him there burning with indignation, and only too anxious to fall in with her father's plans ; " there's no time to be lost in trying to find out what this precious uncle of Elinor's is at, before we let her go back to Flairs."

" Go back to Flairs ? You don't surely mean there is any chance of that yet ?"

" Don't I ? I have reasons of my own for seeing his letters to Elinor before she gets them ; of course, as her father, even if her happiness were not threatened, I am perfectly justified in doing this. Yesterday," he lowered his voice instinctively, " there came a letter recalling her to Flairs ; the fever is quite over, and she's to be moped in that dismal place until this young foundling—whom she is to marry—is of age."

" To marry whom ?" exclaimed Fisher—he began to take the matter more to Roland's satisfaction.

" Why, you have seen him here ; that young fellow who calls himself Karse," and then he told Fisher some part of his interview with Maurice and his suspicions.

James Fisher sat thinking, and although Markham was impatient to hurry on matters, he felt that he must not show this too plainly.

"It would be easy enough, I expect, to find out if the West Indian Dryden left a son; but even then, I can't see how your knowledge of this could hinder your brother-in-law's plans."

"Why, if we could prove to Elinor that she was to be married to an impostor—no Dryden at all, in fact—do you think she would submit tamely?"

"It seems to me,"—James Fisher spoke with an icy coldness, that showed Markham the mistake he had made,—“that your daughter Elinor is not a girl who would marry any one she did not choose for herself; if she cares enough for this Mr. Karse—or whatever his real name may be—she will marry him, let him be a Dryden or not.”

"Confound it all, man, how hasty you are; however, I suppose I'm treading on tender ground—Elinor doesn't now care a fig for Karse. I know her likes and dislikes better than that. But if she goes back to Flairs free,

and perhaps disappointed into the bargain, there is no knowing what may be done there by constantly putting the screw on."

James Fisher sat irresolute.

"But if Mr. Dryden has set his heart so earnestly on this scheme, it appears to me he would disinherit Elinor as soon as he learned her disobedience."

Roland Markham's sneer surpassed itself; with all his craft and his spirit of working out his ends by intrigue, instead of by honest dealing, he had never yet been able to forego the dear delight of sneering at those he considered less wise than himself, even when he had a special reason for standing well with them.

James Fisher reddened; he turned away from Markham, and began twisting an envelope that lay on the table.

His cousin's mood changed in an instant.

"You are quite right there, Fisher," he spoke with a sort of approving seriousness, "but I cannot see why he need know it. Elinor tells me her uncle's agreement with her is, that she is not to entangle herself in any engagement

without his permission, till she is of age—the old fool having settled that that is not to happen till she is twenty-three. She is then to be declared his heiress, but now — stop a bit,” for Fisher tried to speak, “Wentworth Dryden is not a man to eat his words. If Elinor is once recognised as his heiress, he will never disinherit her, although he may, perhaps, refuse to see or receive the husband she chooses. His notion is, I expect, that she will be married to this precious *protégé* of his, fast enough by that time; it used to be incomprehensible to me, the way in which he shut her up, and then sent her into exile—but now the daylight comes in fast. Why, if you notice, Elinor had been here scarcely any time before that young spark was sent to look after her. By George, when I see how completely we’ve been hood-winked, I’m sorry I didn’t thrash him.”

He turned away, and began to poke the fire almost out of the grate; he saw that Fisher was deliberating, and perhaps if he were let alone, he might screw up his courage, but

Roland felt that he could not leave it in doubt. A letter might come for Elinor by the mid-day post—he dared not withhold from her after to-morrow the one that had already arrived ; something told him that if she knew how near her return was, she would not bind herself to anyone. This would probably be her last meeting with James Fisher.

“ I’ll tell you what, James,” he said with such a well assumed frankness, that even his cousin was quite deceived, “ I believe I’ve made a great mistake,”—and then he stopped as if he needed help to get out the rest of his sentence.

“ I think you made a mistake in not telling me the nature of Mr. Dryden’s conditions before ; is that what you mean ?” Mr. Fisher’s manner was not encouraging.

“ Stuff and nonsense. I thought you knew all about it ; no, I mean a mistake about you and Elinor. Liking you as I have done from a boy, and seeing—as I thought, at least—how much you were taken with Elinor, I made up my mind you were just suited to each other, and I hoped you would win her ; but as I have made

a mistake—as in plain words this can't be, lend me your help like a good fellow to find out who and what this young Karse is, because after all Elinor may grow to like him, and there's no mistake about his love for her; there's no shilly shallying about it, he'll go to work with a will at wooing when he gets a chance; that's the only thing I like about him, and though I should have liked to baulk Wentworth, still, if my child is happy, why should I wish it otherwise?"

His heartiness was so well assumed, that even Fisher could not doubt it now.

"But who ever said I was willing to give up Elinor? If I only thought I had a good chance; if I were sure she did not love that arrogant young upstart, I'd speak to her at once."

"But bless my soul, James, how can you be sure unless you do speak to her? I thought you knew a good deal about women, and their ways. Why, they're as sly as cats; besides, you could not expect Elinor to tell you she was free, ready, willing, to accept your affection directly it was offered? Bless my soul—bless my soul, that's not the way I went courting."

"But there seems never a chance of seeing her alone."

"Isn't there? I used to make such chances." Markham grew more and more cavalier as he saw the other's excitement. "Honestly, James, I'm afraid you have lost your chance. I must give her the letter to-morrow morning, and if she takes it into her head to start at once, why she'll start, and you will have seen your last of her for the rest of your life."

Seen the last of Elinor! All his better feelings—which even this evening had still pleaded for Adelaide—were stifled under the sudden awakening; he could not yield up Elinor to Maurice Karse. As he thought of his rival's physical advantages, a fierce hatred kindled in his tepid nature, and as fierce a resolution to win in the struggle between them. He was timid and suspicious, and yet he believed that if she once promised herself to him, she would keep faith, but his own self-experience gave him no hope or security without a binding pledge. She must regard herself as his promised wife before she left London. And yet he hesitated;

if he had known this about the Squire before, he would have kept out of Elinor's way.

Have you ever seen men climb a greased mast projecting over deep water, for a reward fastened to the end? they know before they attempt it they cannot return by the way they came; when they reach the quivering end of the wood, they must boldly plunge head foremost, and swim for their lives, or they must fall ignominiously into the water without the prize, and be greeted by the laughter of the bystanders. If you watch their faces, you will see that in many instances the required effort is almost beyond them, they glare round in agony, craving the help—which they too well know cannot reach them, or if it could, would be withheld.

And in making up his mind to the first decided act of his life—although he had the consolation of a doubt as to the cold shock he might be called on to undergo—James Fisher's mental torture came very near that of the mast climbers.

He stood silent, holding his chin with one

hand, and pressing the knuckles of the other into the table, till Roland Markham's patience was exhausted.

"Well," he said abruptly, "the fire seems almost out, so I move we adjourn; I've no doubt they have a better one up-stairs; they must be wondering what the deuce has become of us; come along, I dare say you'd like to bid good-bye to Elinor, only don't tell tales about the letter, you know."

"If I come to-morrow morning will you arrange for me to see her alone?"

"If you really are sure you want to see her alone, why don't you see her to-night, my good fellow? Ah, I see you know very little indeed about women; why in the morning they are cold, and languid, and listless, their circulation is stagnant; but in the evening, when the blood is warmed with exercise and excitement, there is glow enough to catch at the faintest tokens of love. There's poetry for you."

"Well, then,"—and Mr. Fisher felt suddenly that, having gone so far, it would be easier to go on, than to begin all over again in the morn-

ing,—“ shall I find her alone now, if I go up into the drawing-room ?”

“ No—stay,” said Markham, he was terribly puzzled ; he was so little certain of Elinor’s preference of Fisher—unless she were moved by his earnest wooing—that he felt sure the slightest symptom of management on his own part, or of timidity on the lover’s, would rouse her haughty spirit to determined opposition. He stamped his foot at last in impatience at his own want of ingenuity.

“ I can’t fetch my wife and Addy down here ; it would look too patent ; besides, mind you, James, if the thing’s to be, only we three must know of it, or it will soon reach Dryden’s ears. Hang it, man, can’t you suggest something ? why, when I ran away with her mother, I had to plan everything, and carry it out too.”

Mr. Fisher had grown excited ; he was thinking of Elinor, and how soon she might be almost his own—he was as eager as Roland himself now.

“ Look here,” he said, “ it would be best for me to see her down here, but—”

"But you don't imagine she'll come down to you, do you?" said Markham, with a rude laugh; between suppressed anger and desperate impatience he had lost all control; "really, Fisher—"

"Be quiet, Roland; I don't mean anything of the sort: don't you suppose I have just as much respect for Elinor's feelings as you have?" he felt inclined to say rather more, but he suppressed it. "I'm going, now, or at least I'm going to open the street door and shut it, but *you* needn't know that I'm not gone—now do you understand? can't you go up-stairs and ask her to come down and fetch something for you, and then—"

"Capital! upon my word;" Roland looked at his cousin with genuine admiration: "you'll do, after all."

CHAPTER VI.

ELINOR'S LETTER.

LONG after her mother had left the breakfast-table, to go up to Adelaide, who was reported too ill to leave her room, Elinor sate alone—her uncle's open letter in her hands. At last, then, at last she had reached the goal of her hopes—she was going back to Flairs, as its mistress, for there was a courtesy in the Squire's words that made her feel he no longer considered her either as a child, or a self-willed school-girl, but as a woman, who henceforward would share in his plans and daily life; he told her, with much feeling, of Ben's death, as if sure of her sympathy; he spoke of Cecil Brownlow as her

guest, and said he looked anxiously for Elinor's return that she might devise amusements for them both—amusements to Elinor meaning dinners, balls, social meetings of any kind, which would bring her before the notice of the county.

And what had she done? she had promised only a few hours before to be the wife of James Fisher.

She had yielded, it seemed to her now, against her better judgment, to the persuasion that she must love a man who so worshipped her—who she felt through life would continue to worship her, to idolise her, as Maurice never would have done. In her deep, proud mortification at his continued silence and absence, which she could not understand, for she had posted her last note to him herself,—James Fisher's earnest tenderness had been very soothing; but when she accepted him as her future husband she had not been conscious of all this—she had yielded to the charm of his presence, and to the secret belief that he could make her happier than any one else could.

This morning, as in the endeavour to justify to herself an impetuosity she now felt ashamed of, she analysed her feelings for both her lovers; Maurice's faults rose in strong relief—he was always so masterful, so hypercritical about truth; she still shrank with a consciousness that was half shame, half anger, from the remembrance of his look when she had denied meeting him to her father; she was gratified by his love, but she always felt schooled by him; no, he never could have made her happy.

What nonsense she was thinking—she started up and walked vehemently to the window, to try to let in outer sights and sounds as a help in flinging away such a folly; she had been dreaming or doting ever to permit Maurice to consider himself her lover, ever to address her as an equal—how deeply she had forgotten herself; and she hid her burning cheeks in both hands, and sobbed passionately.

Her mother came in and out, but she took no heed, and poor Mrs. Markham softened towards her daughter, and went up and told Adelaide that poor dear Elinor was crying fit to

break her heart at leaving them. For an instant a gleam of hope flickered in the sick girl's eyes, but the next she turned her face away on her pillow, and something like a sob caught her mother's ear.

Till then, in spite of her previous suspicions, she had believed in Adelaide's head-ache as her reason for keeping her room, but maternal instinct sharpens the dullest wits. She stooped over the bed till she could see the tears rolling fast on to the pillow.

"Addy, Addy! what is it? you are keeping something from me, and it is breaking your heart, my own poor child!" She put both arms round her, and hid Adelaide's face as she turned it round, with her own.

Sobs came only as the answer; then, in broken words—

"Hush, mother, I can't—don't ask me—it is happier, better for me not to tell;" then, while her mother still urged her confession, with the soft, murmuring words by which we soothe young children, she went on more coherently—
"I will tell you why I am crying, now, and you

shall tell me if it is wicked; dear, dear mother, it seems as if I never knew how you loved me, before. Is it wrong to be glad and thankful that Elinor is going? I can't think about right and wrong any more;"—she spoke vehemently: "*I am glad*—we were all happy before she came, and now—"

Mrs. Markham was so shocked and frightened that she began to soothe again with double energy, although her curiosity was restless to be sure of what had raised this storm in her quiet daughter; like most weak women she generally gained her ends by watching opportunity, experience having taught her that she had not the requisite firmness to compel answers.

But though, after she had quieted Adelaide, she tried in various ways to elicit her secret, she met with no success. Only, when pressed hard at last to account for her ill health, she said faintly—

"If you could afford it, and would take me away from home a little while, it would do me all the good I want."

And then Mrs. Markham stopped her enqui-

ries ; she saw plainly that it was James Fisher Adelaide wished to go away from, and she determined that even at the risk of exciting Roland's anger by such an unusual expense at such a time of year, her poor, wronged child should have the change she wished for.

It was the first real anxiety—except money matters, that Mrs. Markham had met with, and it roused her out of her usual easy way of life.

Before the train which carried Elinor and her maid to Flairs had reached its destination, Mrs. Markham had persuaded her husband, who was in an excellent humour at the success of his schemes, to spare her and Adelaide for a few weeks' absence from home.

END OF VOL. II.

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